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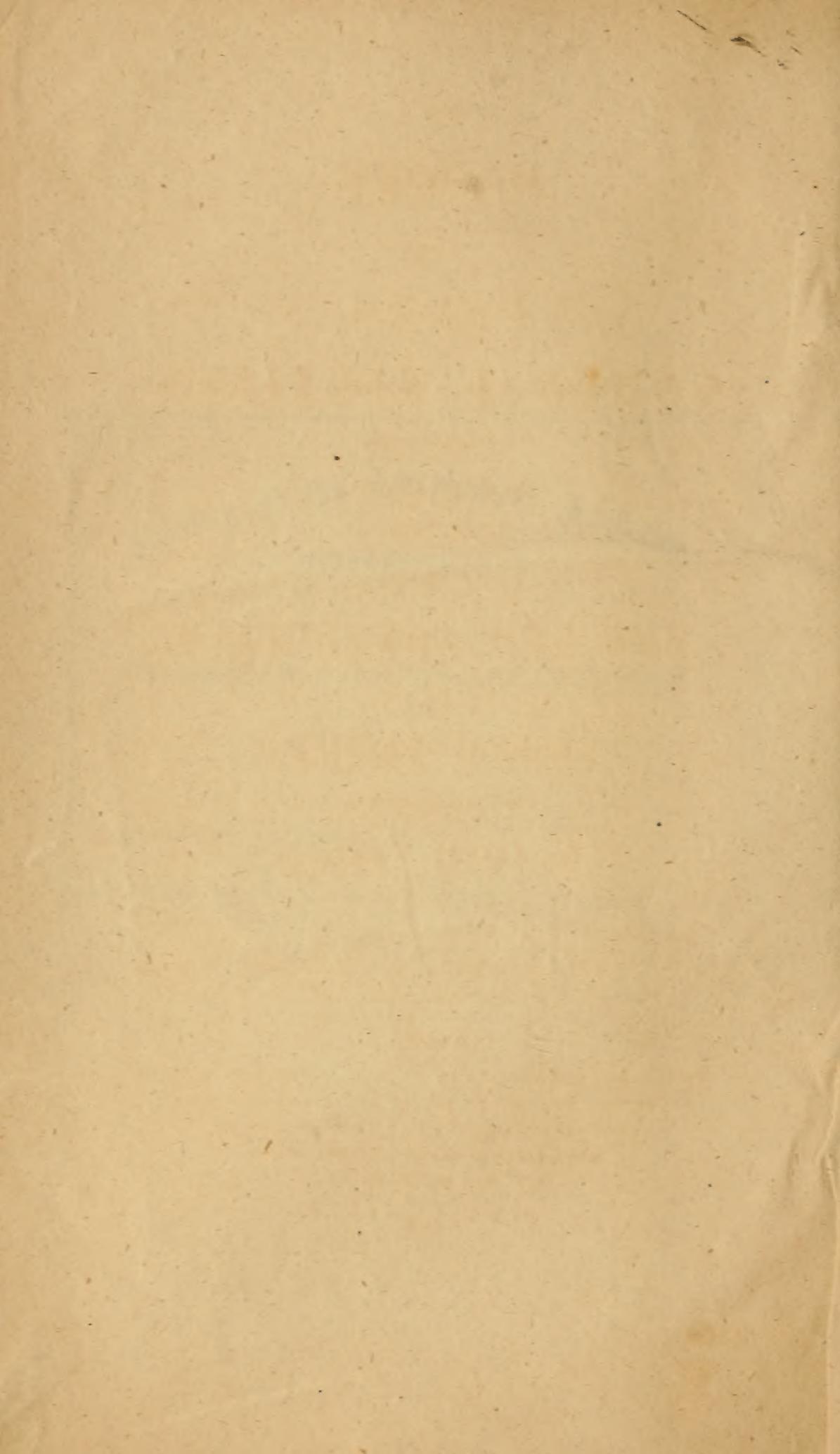
PRINCETON, N. J.

Presented by Mr. Samuel Agnew of Philadelphia, Pa.

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THE
HISTORY
OF THE
ENGLISH
GENERAL BAPTISTS.

In Two Parts.

PART SECOND:

THE NEW CONNECTION
OF
GENERAL BAPTISTS.

BY ADAM TAYLOR.

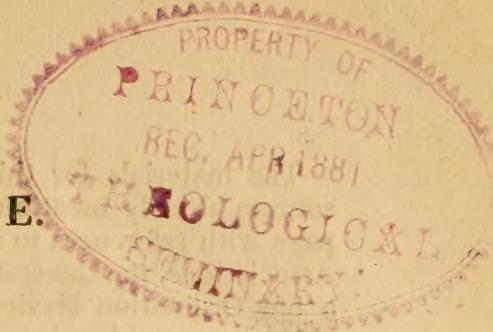
"THOU SHALT REMEMBER ALL THE WAY WHICH
THE LORD THY GOD LED THEE." *Moses.*

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P R E F A C E.



FOR many years, a wish had been frequently expressed, that the Rise and Progress of the New Connection of General Baptists should be committed to the press. The facts are instructive and interesting; and the worthy men, who had been the principal instruments in carrying forwards the good work, were daily resting from their labours. Their successors, therefore, were anxious that the particulars should be collected and secured, before the removal of all those who could best furnish information. Various attempts were made to accomplish this purpose; which failed of success. At length, the annual Association at Wisbeach, in 1812, requested the writer of the following sheets to undertake the work. This request being repeated at the next meeting of that assembly, and promises of information and support being made, he ventured to yield to their solicitations; and, through the goodness of divine Providence, and the patronage of his kind friends, has been enabled to bring the design to a conclusion.

The author has been considerably assisted, in tracing the early transactions of the General Baptists of the midland counties, by the accounts which appeared in the General Baptist Magazine, from the pen of Mr. J. Deacon; as well as by some valuable materials collected by that gentleman, and kindly handed to the writer. But his chief dependance has been on the information transmitted from the various churches. This information has been more full and particular in some cases than others: several churches sent their communications after a great part of the work was published; and a few neglected to furnish any documents. Hence, the reader will account for the more enlarged detail respecting certain societies, and the scantiness of the information respecting others. This too will, it is hoped, apologize for the want of a strict attention to method in certain instances, and for those mistakes, which a dependance on the general accounts in the Minutes of the Associations may have occasioned. These inaccuracies, as far as they have been discovered, are corrected, at the close of the volume: and the author will esteem it a favour to be informed of any which remain unnoticed; that a second edition, should it ever be called for, may be less imperfect.

The materials for this volume having been drawn from the sources already mentioned, it was not necessary to crowd the page with references to authorities. The Minutes of the Annual Associations, the General Baptist Magazine and Repository, and a few Ordination services, which must have been incessantly quoted, are publications with which, it is presumed, the readers of this history are familiar.

Great difficulty was experienced in forming a plan which would exhibit, at once, a history of the Churches individually, and of the Connection as a body. The division of the narrative into periods of fifteen years appeared the most eligible. But the Index is so constructed, that the entire history of any society may be easily traced, as well as a connected account of the public transactions of eminent ministers.

The author has too frequently found his duty painfully delicate. To record the failings of his associates and friends has cost him many a struggle. On these disagreeable occasions, he has laboured to preserve the fidelity of the narrative, and at the same time to do as little violence as possible to personal feeling. One great advantage of the work would have been entirely lost, had these unhappy circumstances been consigned to oblivion. It is hoped, that the perusal of the deplorable apostacy of some who made high professions, and the contentions and imperfections of other sincere but weak christians, together with the awful mischief which the cause of the blessed Redeemer has sustained by these means, will cause him that thinketh he standeth to take heed lest he fall: and excite every reader, but especially every minister, to be more earnest and constant in praying for grace to preserve him from giving any occasion to the enemies of the truth to blaspheme, and doubly vigilant in shunning every appearance of evil.

The work is now sent abroad with a cheerful hope, that it may, through the blessing of Him, in whose hands are the hearts of the children of men, give the religious world more just ideas of the design, doctrines and character of the New Connection of General Baptists than have hitherto been entertained, and thus procure for it, that esteem and countenance among other denominations, which it may appear to deserve; and that it may call the attention of those who compose that Connection to the true nature and principles of their union, and animate them to pursue, with greater zeal, affection and ability, its important objects. Should these hopes be realized, the labour of the writer and the support of his friends will be abundantly rewarded, in the increasing prosperity, respectability and purity of that cause, to which they, have, from principle, devoted all their energies.

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THE
HISTORY
OF THE
ENGLISH GENERAL BAPTISTS.

PART II.

THE NEW CONNECTION.

BOOK I.

THE HISTORY, PREVIOUS TO THE FORMATION OF
THE NEW CONNECTION, OF THOSE CHURCHES WHICH
ORIGINALLY COMPOSED IT.

INTRODUCTION.

THE New Connection of General Baptists was formed in 1770: and, at its commencement, consisted of several churches in the Midland and Northern counties, which, during the preceding thirty years, had risen from small beginnings to respectability; and a few of the societies of which we have treated, in the former part of this work. It will be necessary, therefore, before we proceed to the History of the New Connection, to lay before our readers the most interesting particulars of the rise of the former congregations, and their progress, previous to the formation of that union; and to continue our account of the latter churches, from the close of the seventeenth century to the same period.

CHAP. I.

*THE RISE OF THE GENERAL BAPTIST INTEREST
IN THE MIDLAND COUNTIES; AND ITS
PROGRESS TO THE FORMATION OF THE NEW
CONNECTION.*

SECT. 1.—*David Taylor preaches in Leicestershire—Joseph Donisthorpe at Normanton—they unite—gain Proselytes—are persecuted—and triumph over their enemies.*

ABOUT the middle of the last century, the doctrines of the gospel appear to have been almost banished from the pulpits of the establishment. The late Mr. John Newton, though a clergyman of the church of England, says, “I am not sure, that, in the year 1740, there was a single parochial minister, who was publicly known as a gospel preacher, in the whole kingdom.”* In most places, the clergymen were persons of a dissolute life, who freely engaged in all the sports and vices of the age. This appears to have been peculiarly the case in the country parishes of the midland counties: and, as there were but few dissenters, and those chiefly in the large towns, the form of religion, as well as the power, was, in many of the villages, almost unknown. The inhabitants were involved in the most deplorable ignorance;—“darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.”

In this gloomy state, it pleased God to send forth his zealous servants, Messrs. Wesley and

* Letters and Conversational Remarks, pp. 75. 76.

Whitfield, to rouse our countrymen to an attention to the most important of all concerns, the salvation of their immortal souls. These useful men encountered violent opposition; but were blest with astonishing success: and were soon joined by many respectable characters. Amongst others, the pious Lady Huntingdon entered warmly into their views; and exerted all the influence which her rank and fortune gave her, to promote their success. David Taylor, one of her servants, residing with her at Donington Park, in Leicestershire, having himself tasted that the Lord was gracious, was occasionally employed, under the sanction of her ladyship, in preaching in the neighbourhood. In these benevolent excursions, he visited, in 1741, Glenfield and Ratby, two villages near Leicester. Curiosity led many to hear the strange preacher, and his new doctrines: and, among the rest, Mr. Samuel Deacon of Ratby, afterwards for many years pastor of the general baptist church at Barton. Being informed, when at work in the field, that a person had been preaching in the street, at Glenfield, and was going to preach again at Ratby, he immediately laid down his scythe, and went to hear him. The sermon made a lasting impression on his mind, and induced him to search the scriptures. The dissoluteness and ignorance of the clergyman now struck him in a new light: and he began to reflect on his own danger, as part of the flock of so careless a shepherd. After much reading, reasoning, and perplexity, he was enabled to rely on Christ alone for salvation: and immediately found peace and joy in believing.*

* Gen. Bap. Repository, Vol. VII. pp. 50—52.

About this time, the Countess of Huntingdon, judging that David Taylor would be more useful as a preacher, if set at liberty from other engagements, dismissed him from her service. His visits to Ratby and Glenfield then became more frequent : and several were awakened to a sense of divine things. In the following year, he was accompanied by Stephen Dixon, a fellow-labourer ; and their united exertions were blest with increasing success. Several of their followers soon attempted to teach, as well as they were able, the way of salvation to others. Two schoolmasters from Markfield, John Taylor and C. Clapham, were frequently employed in this good work at Ratby : to which village one of them removed, and formed a society on the plan of the Methodists.*

At the same time that these transactions took place at Ratby, Joseph Donisthorpe, a respectable blacksmith at Normanton, a place some miles distant, was brought to feel a concern for the salvation of his soul. He had read the scriptures, and saw that the law of God required perfect and continued obedience ; which, he was conscious, he had not rendered to it. His mind was, therefore, filled with most gloomy apprehensions respecting the account which he knew he must give. Anxious to escape from the wrath to come, he applied to a neighbouring clergyman, for advice : but that poor man, totally unacquainted with the gospel plan of salvation, could only encourage Mr. Donisthorpe to depend on the honesty of his dealings in his transactions with men, and the goodness of his moral character : adding, "Take my advice ; make yourself easy ; continue to at-

* Gen. Bap. Magazine, Vol. I. pp. 181, 182.

tend your church : and, if all be not right at last, I will bear the blame." This assurance did not satisfy the enquirer : his uneasiness continued to increase, and he was driven to the brink of despair. At length, as he was returning, one evening, from a neighbouring town, his mind deeply affected with his lost condition, and wondering how Providence could suffer such a wretch to live, he suddenly recollect ed the assertion of the apostle, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." His astonished mind was at once filled with the grandeur and importance of the truths which then first presented themselves to his contemplation. Redemption for a lost world, thro' the blood of Christ, filled his whole soul with the highest admiration, and the warmest gratitude ; and changed his fears into joy. Supposing that he was the only person on earth to whom this grand scheme was known, he instantly determined, from motives of the purest benevolence, to communicate the good news to his fellow-sinners. He assured himself, that the intelligence would be received with rapture, by all mankind ; but especially by the clergymen ; who, though it was their business to teach men the way to heaven, were, he was persuaded, totally ignorant of it themselves. He went home, and immediately began to execute his philanthropic design, by imparting to his wife the grand discovery which he had made : when, to his great disappointment, instead of hearing it with grateful joy, she burst into tears, fearing that his intellects were deranged. The regularity of his general conduct, however, soon undeceived her : she listened

with more attention ; and appears to have been his first convert.

Full of the heart-felt subject, he discoursed on “*justification by faith*” to all who visited his house, to the customers whom business brought to his shop, and almost to every one whom he met in the street. Some heard with attention ; others reviled and persecuted him : yet the Normanton blacksmith, and his new doctrine, soon became the chief subject of conversation in the neighbourhood. Numbers flocked to his house, in the evening, after the toils of the day were finished, to examine these strange discoveries. Not a few disputed, rather than embraced the doctrine : and this obliged Mr. Donisthorpe to study the subject, and to furnish himself with arguments in its defence, both from reason and scripture. One evening, sitting on his own kitchen-table, which raised him above his neighbours, whom he had accommodated with all his chairs, he began to describe the lost state of man by nature—his utter inability to deliver himself from this dreadful situation—and the certainty and sufficiency of salvation by Christ. Full of his subject, and animated with a strong desire to make others as happy as himself, he undesignedly engrossed the whole conversation ; and held on, with a fluency and earnestness that prevented interruption, for nearly two hours. At the close of this harangue, he was startled at the idea that he had been preaching. This thought had never before occurred to him : for, though he was desirous to teach his fellow-creatures the love of God to sinners ; yet he designed to do it only by occasional conversation ; and never entertained the most distant wish to become a public minister. His benevolence produced his first sermon :

and, from the attention with which it was heard, he was encouraged to proceed.*

Normanton and Ratby being only a few miles distant, David Taylor and Joseph Donisthorpe were soon informed of each other's proceedings : and mutually sought an acquaintance. This was readily obtained : and, uniting their efforts, they carried on the good work with greater activity. In 1743, a poor man of Osbaston, near Market Bosworth, Leicestershire, invited these preachers to his house, where many attended their labours. Attracted by the novelty, John Whyatt, a carpenter, of Barton Fabis, in the same county, went to Osbaston ; and was much affected under the first discourse. At the next opportunity, he persuaded his neighbour, Mr. John Aldridge, a respectable farmer, to accompany him. He also was convinced of the importance of religion ; and joined with his friend, in soliciting the ministers to visit Barton. As they were zealous to spread the glad tidings of the gospel, they cheerfully accepted the invitation —John Taylor went, and preached the first sermon in Mr. Whyatt's house.

For a few weeks, Mr. Taylor repeated his visits without interruption ; and one evening took an opportunity of reading to his auditors an account of the persecutions endured by the eminent John Cennick. His object, doubtless, was to give them exalted ideas of the power of divine grace, which inspired that minister with such zeal for the glory of God, and such love to immortal souls, as enabled him to support his sufferings : but it had a very different effect. The feelings of his hearers were unhappily more in unison with the persecuting rabble, than the persecuted saint :

* Gen. Bap. Repository, Vol. I. pp. 241—245.

and they determined not to be outdone in wickedness.

The next time, therefore, that John Taylor visited Barton, a number of persons from Nailstone, a village a mile distant, assembled ; and endeavoured so disturb the worship. Some tied bells round their bodies, and danced about the place : others sung and swore : and all united in the most violent threats against the preacher and his abettors. Mr. Taylor, after repeated attempts, in which he received gross insult and abuse, finding it impossible to proceed with the service, was obliged to consult his own safety, and secretly withdrew. Having thus prevented the preaching, the mob retired. But a farmer, not pleased with the escape of the minister, caused it to be proclaimed, with sound of horn, through the neighbouring villages, that whoever would attend, and assist in taking the methodist parson, the next time he came, wheresoever he should be found, should be rewarded with a barrel of ale ; and indemnified, should the house be pulled down where he was.

Finding things assume so threatening an aspect, Mr. J. Aldridge applied to Sir Wolston Dixie, a magistrate of Bosworth, for advice and protection; who informed him, that it would be lawful to resist such a mob; and even to fire upon them, if they proceeded to attack their dwelling-houses; but recommended more lenient measures, and promised to discountenance all future disturbers of their worship. Thus encouraged, Mr. Aldridge resolved to take the preacher under his own protection ; as his rank and property gave him more influence than Mr. Whyatt possessed : and, when Mr. Taylor arrived, on the following Saturday, he conducted them to his own house.

Towards night, a numerous mob assembled, headed by the constable of Nailstone, and some of the principal farmers. They marched to Mr. Whyatt's house to seize the preacher; but not finding him, they proceeded to search every house in the village, till they arrived at Mr. Aldridge's. Here a few people had assembled to meet the minister; and were preparing to commence social worship; when they observed several hundreds of people rush tumultuously into the yard. The outward door was instantly locked, and almost as soon broken open. Mr. Aldridge's brother, seizing his gun, hastened to the passage, and threatened to shoot those who advanced: but, while he hesitated, the mob rushed violently upon him: and, wrenching the gun out of his hand, discharged it into the air. The inner door being fastened, they attempted to force it open, by thrusting their fingers between the door and door-posts. One of Mr. Aldridge's sisters, in order to induce the rabble to desist, thoughtlessly took a cleaver; and, drawing it down the side of the door, wounded the fingers that were endeavouring to force it open. This imprudent action roused the fury of the assailants to the utmost pitch. They burst the door in an instant: and, seizing Mr. Aldridge's father, an infirm old man, they dragged him into the yard, and insulted and bruised him in a cruel manner. His wife, though she had shut herself in a parlour, was treated with the same barbarity. The preacher, the chief object of their rage, had secured himself in a separate apartment: but his retreat was quickly discovered by his enraged pursuers. They haled him out, amidst shouts of triumph, and the most horrid oaths and imprecations. Having secured

several of the people, they conducted them and the minister, first to Nailstone, where they exhibited them, as trophies of victory, from house to house.* From thence they returned to Osbaston, in hopes of receiving some reward for their exploits from a gentleman of that place; but he properly refused to countenance such disgraceful conduct.

The evening being now far advanced, they returned to Nailstone, treating their prisoners, on the way, in the most savage manner. They threw Mr. Aldridge into a fish-pond: and two of the mob, being accidentally pushed in with him, they endeavoured to force him beyond his depth: threatening to drown him if he would not recant. He bore their insults with christian meekness, till he perceived his life to be really in danger: when, being a strong young man, he easily plunged his persecutors in the water, and made his escape. Joseph Donisthorpe, of Normanton, who was one of the prisoners, was seized by the hair, dragged to a gate, his neck violently bent across it, and threatened with immediate death. Others had their clothes torn to pieces, were pelted with mud, and led through the most miry places that could be found. They arrived, late, at Nailstone: when they set at liberty all the prisoners, except J. Taylor, the minister, and J. Whyatt. The former, they confined in a chamber, at an inn; and permitted the latter to sit by

* During this wanton exhibition, from house to house, Mr. Taylor frequently repeated the following lines :

“ For me my Saviour thus was led,
“ For me a gazing-stock was made :
“ All praise be to his holy name,
“ Who counts me worthy of his shame.”

the kitchen fire. After a time, they would have dismissed Mr. Whyatt; but he refused to leave his minister; and, through the night, experienced every indignity which the malice of his enraged persecutors could devise: all which he supported like a disciple of the lowly Jesus. In the morning, he visited his family: but, regardless of the fatigues of the night, returned to Nail-stone church, in time for the forenoon service. Here he met Mr. Taylor: who, though a prisoner, would not omit what he thought his duty; but attended public worship, at the same place, under a guard. For these good men had not yet formed any system of their own, or entertained any design of deserting the established church.

The next morning, the constable, accompanied by the most active rioters, carried Mr. Taylor before Sir Wolston Dixie; and laid heavy charges against him and his followers, exhibiting the wounded fingers as proofs of their accusations. Sir William naturally inquired into the cause of these wounds; and the explanation afforded him great amusement. Yet he treated the preacher and his friends with contempt and harshness: and, notwithstanding his former promises, he shewed a disposition to excuse every measure that tended to suppress the methodists, as he tauntingly styled them. But, not choosing to commit himself by any decision, he bound the parties over to the next quarter sessions. On leaving the magistrate's, the mob, encouraged by the countenance which they had received, pursued the objects of their hatred for several miles, across the fields; and, overtaking J. Whyatt, plunged him into a ditch, and otherwise abused him. At Osbaston, a large bonfire was made, as a token of rejoicing for the defeat of the

methodists, whom they threatened with utter destruction.*

It now became unsafe for these persecuted people to meet publicly; but they continued to assemble more privately, and to encourage each other in their attachment to the truth. They continued to attend public worship at the established church: though, as their views of the gospel became more extended and clear, they felt increasing dissatisfaction with the doctrines maintained by its ministers. Some of them ventured to remonstrate with two neighbouring clergymen, whom they thought most friendly to their tenets; but met with no redress. This increased their discontent; and prepared their minds to become regular dissenters. Meantime the malice of their enemies invented daily new methods of harassing them. Many of these poor people, who had large families, and depended solely on the labour of their hands for support, being dismissed by their employers, on account of attending the preaching, were reduced to great distress. Yet they bore all with christian fortitude; and even rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer in so good a cause.†

* Some ideas of the ignorance and impiety of these wretched men, may be formed from the fact, that, many of them, while dancing round the bonfire, exclaimed, with the most horrid imprecations, "We will burn the Holy Ghost with the methodists."—Gen Bap Mag. Vol. I. p 187.

† Of this, Mr. Joseph Donisthorpe was a signal instance. The farmers and tradesmen, on whom he depended for employment, took great offence at his frequent religious conversations. They were sorry that he should make such a fool of himself, as they chose to term it; and were determined to oblige him to desist. They went, therefore, in a body, to his house; and, in a friendly manner, advised him to leave off exposing himself, and disturbing the village. Finding this mode of attack not likely to succeed, they threatened him, that, if he did not comply with their

In the beginning of 1744, the quarter sessions were held at Leicester: when, the cause of the Barton methodists being heard, they were cast. A decision, so evidently partial and contrary to the laws of the country, induced their attorney, Mr. Peck of Leicester, to advise them to carry their cause to a higher tribunal. A statement of their case being drawn up, was laid before an eminent counsellor, who gave an opinion decidedly opposed to the verdict of the jury, at the sessions. Mr. Peck was, therefore, directed to

wishes, they would take all their work from his shop; and hinted, that they had procured another workman to serve them. Having now seven small children, and expecting the eighth, this was a trying occasion: yet he behaved with firmness and propriety. "Gentlemen," said he, "are you pleased with my work?" "Yes," they replied, "we find no fault with that." "And," resumed he, "are my wages reasonable?" "Yes," they replied, "we are satisfied in these respects: our complaints are of a different nature." "These, Gentlemen," continued Mr. Donisthorpe, "are the duties which I owe to you. What concerns God and my own conscience, you have no concern with: God forbid that I should obey you rather than him. The cause is his: and if, for the sake of his cause, you deprive me of the means of obtaining a livelihood, I have no doubt but he will support both me and it." Seeing him thus determined, his employers called for his books; discharged their bills; took away their work unfinished as it was; and left him without any visible resource.

Mr. D.'s confidence in the care of Providence was not disappointed. At first, he thought of travelling the country to do jobs. This scheme strongly recommended itself to him, by the opportunities which it would furnish him of making known the gospel. But, before he could put this design into execution, an unexpected order, from a London gentleman, a perfect stranger, prevented it. He executed the order, received payment for it; and a further order. But other work had then come in: and, before he could set about the goods for London, he accidentally observed the name of his employer in a list of bankrupts. This appeared to him another instance of the care of his heavenly Father; who had supplied his wants in the time of need, and prevented him from suffering by this unforeseen failure.

G. B. Rep. Vol. I. pp. 247, 248.

indict several of the principal offenders at the Crown office. But, though notices of this were sent to the parties, the persecution did not abate. They treated the letters with contempt: and, ostentatiously tearing them in pieces, trampled them under-foot in the streets. The people at Barton continued to be treated in the most outrageous manner: their persecutors, elated with the victory they had obtained, gave a loose to their passions, and deemed it a virtue to harass them by every means they could employ.

At length the Assizes approached, and regular citations were sent to the persons indicted. This roused them to reflection: and, perceiving the dangerous situation in which their excesses had placed them, they sunk into abject despondency.* The most submissive applications were made, and the most moving intreaties used, to induce those, whom they had so cruelly abused, to stop the proceedings, and not suffer the cause to come to a trial. The Barton friends, wishing only to enjoy their native rights without interruption, consented, at last, to drop the prosecution, on condition that their persecutors would pay all the expences which had, from the

* When the attorney's clerk went to Nailstone to present the citations, most of the persons to whom they were addressed were gone to a fair at Bosworth. The clerk followed; and found them in the midst of their diversions. One young man, of whom he was in quest, was preparing to entertain the mob, with a burlesque imitation of a methodist sermon: and, having mounted a stool, was composing his countenance to the requisite gravity; when the clerk stept up to him, and, presenting the citation, said, "Here, my lad, I'll furnish you with a text." But, alas! the mock parson could not read. He was, however, soon informed of the contents of the paper. This closed his frolic; he instantly descended, and sneaked away in silence: thus becoming himself an object of derision to the laughing spectators.

first, been occasioned by their violence. As many witnesses had been examined, and several eminent counsel retained, the costs amounted to a considerable sum ; and fell heavy on seven or eight of the farmers. Yet the terms were considered as generous ; and received by the parties concerned with gratitude : and all further violence was as effectually checked, as it could have been, had the cause proceeded, and large damages been awarded against the offenders.*

SECT. 2.—*Proceedings of the Barton Preachers, from the Nailstone Persecution to the time when they adopted the practice of Believers' Baptism: or, from A.D. 1743 to A.D. 1755.*

Not long after this accommodation, John Taylor, the minister who had shared so largely in this persecution, left Barton, and removed to London : when David Taylor became again the regular preacher. Stephen Dixon, for some time, assisted him in the sacred work ; but, forming an acquaintance with the Moravians at Pudsey in Yorkshire, he joined their society ; and made some fruitless attempts to form the people at Barton into a Moravian church. In about a year, however, Dixon was excluded, for some cause never fully explained, from the fellowship of the Moravians : and one William Kendrick, his intimate friend, being dissatisfied with the proceedings against Dixon, withdrew from the society at Pudsey. They returned to the Barton

* Gen. Bap. Mag. Vol. I. pp. 183—190.

people: and, uniting their efforts to serve them, were received with exultation.

Though these professors had very imperfect ideas of the nature and importance of church-fellowship: yet a few of them were persuaded, by their ministers, to form themselves into a society, which they styled a church. This union was no sooner effected, than Messrs. Kendrick and Dixon were chosen elders; and Mrs. Dixon elderess. This first church was formed in 1745, and consisted, at its formation, of only seven members. But many waited to see the result of the attempt; and crowds attended their public labours: so that their numbers increased rapidly, and the cause flourished.

Thus far they had preached in the dwelling-houses of their friends; but the increasing number of hearers now induced them to wish for a meeting-house. With their usual zeal, they soon determined to build one at Barton, the centre of their exertions: which was as quickly executed. The dimensions of this edifice were thirty-six feet by twenty-two. It had a convenient vestry; and a spacious pulpit; in which eight or ten of their preachers sat, on public occasions. Over the whole building, chambers were constructed, designed as apartments for the single brethren and sisters, on the plan of the Moravians. This addition was probably made by Messrs. Dixon and Kendrick, in anticipation of introducing this practice among their new converts: but, if so, they were disappointed; as we find no traces of any such orders in their churches. Though the members of this congregation were, in general, in poor circumstances; yet they cheerfully exerted themselves, and defrayed all the expences of this erection. Mr. William Collins, a minister whom

Mr. Kendrick invited from London, opened this new meeting-house in 1745.

Mr. Collins continuing in the neighbourhood for several weeks, took considerable pains to instruct these inexperienced professors in the nature and design of church-fellowship and discipline: and his efforts produced considerable effect. They appointed weekly conferences of the ministers and members, for mutual edification, and to conduct the affairs of the church. These conferences were held on the Friday evening: and, though many of the ministers resided at a great distance, yet they were regular and punctual in their attendance. Their zeal animated them to exertions, which, in many instances, almost surpass credibility: and their success was proportioned to their zeal.

They were so intent on the great object of winning souls to Christ, that they overlooked minor arrangements. Though they had now existed for several years, they had adopted no name to distinguish them from other professors. Their enemies, indeed, called them Methodists: but they had never been properly connected with that party, and disapproved of several things in their doctrine and discipline.* But, having now a regular church, and a meeting-house, it became necessary, for the protection of the public property, to assume some specific appellation. They

* Some of these preachers, as we have seen, had been connected with the Moravians; and thence their followers were sometimes called *Moravians*. This outlandish term, however, puzzled their illiterate neighbours, who appear to have had no great relish for hard words. They therefore, anglicised it into the more intelligible appellation, *Ravens*: and *Ravens* and *Methodists* were commonly united as terms of reproach by the persecuting rabble. *G. B. Rep. Vol. II. p. 2.*

felt no inclination to rank with any of their neighbours : and, therefore, adopted a denomination, which, though it had long been appropriated to a party of professors, from whom they greatly differed, yet expressed, as they thought, their determination to think and act for themselves, uninfluenced by foreign controul ; they called themselves *Independents*. Mr. Dixon and Mr. Kendrick assumed the principal direction of this infant society ; but were assisted, in spreading the gospel, by several others : especially by Messrs. J. Aldridge and J. Whyatt ; who had been, for some time, occasionally employed ; and were now considered as regular preachers.

In the same year, Mr. Dixon took a journey to London : where he formed an acquaintance with Mr. Ault, a preacher and a school-master : whom he engaged to visit Barton ; and undertook the charge of his school during his absence. At his return, Mr. Ault found his school so much declined, that he relinquished it ; and returned to settle in Leicestershire. Soon afterwards, Mr. Dixon embraced the doctrine of universal salvation ; and introduced it into his sermons. This created dissatisfaction in the church ; and issued in his expulsion. He removed to Annesley Woodhouse : where his conduct soon appeared as unscriptural as his sentiments. This defection made Mr. Ault's assistance the more necessary and acceptable.

Mr. Kendrick continued to labour with increasing approbation. Being a person of more learning and address than the majority of his associates, he acquired considerable influence over them : and, in effect, managed the affairs of the society as he pleased. He opened a boarding school at Barton with considerable success. This

required him to be more stationary; and called forth the other preachers to labour more frequently at distant places. They were zealous and active, and pushed forwards their excursions on every side: preaching frequently at Hugglescote, Swannington, Hinkley, and other places in Leicestershire; and even visiting distant villages in the neighbouring counties of Derby, Nottingham and Stafford.

Their hands were also, this year, strengthened by the acquisition of several fellow-labourers. Among the rest, Mr. John Grimley and Mr. Francis Smith, became eminently useful, and deserve notice.

Mr. John Grimley was born at Donington on the Heath, near Hugglescote, in 1724. This young man was struck with the grandeur and simplicity of the plan of salvation, as exhibited by these preachers: and, after carefully searching the scriptures, and finding it sanctioned by those divine oracles, he determined to take his lot among the despised people who maintained it. Deeply affected with a sense of the importance of divine things, and possessing good natural abilities, he soon became an useful and active preacher of the gospel.*

Mr. Francis Smith, an inhabitant of Melbourne, Derbyshire, was born in 1719; and had enjoyed the great advantage of a regular and pious education. He lost both his parents when only sixteen years of age: and thus was left, at that dangerous period of life, without restraint.—Having given the reins to his lusts, for seven years, he was induced, through motives of curiosity, to hear the Methodists: by which means

* Gen. Bap. Rep. Vol. I. p. 57.

his former impressions were revived; and he was roused to a sense of his danger. He attempted to reform his conduct; and thus qualify himself to receive the divine mercy: but all his efforts were unsuccessful. He saw so much of the vileness of his nature, that he condemned even the means of necessary support. He almost scrupled to eat or sleep, because he thought he was nourishing a body of sin, to make it strong to rebel against God: and he was tempted to relinquish all attention to religion, since, instead of growing more holy, he was convinced, that he was only adding sin to sin. In this state of mind, he went to hear preaching of every denomination, in hopes of obtaining relief; and was especially entangled with the quakers and mystics. At length, he was persuaded to attend the ministers from Barton: and, after carefully comparing their doctrines with the scripture, for more than a year, he was enabled, without any respect to previous qualifications, as a poor perishing sinner, to repose all his hopes for salvation on the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he found to be Jehovah his Righteousness. He then heartily joined these professors: and, being possessed of a sound understanding, and a good utterance, he was soon called to assist in their great work; in which his former exercises and inquiries prepared him for great usefulness. He preached his first sermon, in 1746, at Kirby-Woodhouse, Nottinghamshire, from Luke ii. 10.*

In 1747, Mr. F. Smith invited his friends to preach at Melbourne: and they cheerfully complied. Their labours in this town were crowned with the usual success: a number of persons were brought to hear the gospel; and, in two or three

* Gen. Bap. Mag. Vol. I. pp. 263—267, and 354.

years, a meeting-house was erected. About the same time, Mr. Smith was chosen joint elder with Mr. Kendrick; and was ordained to that office by Mr. William Cudworth, who was then occasionally at Barton. These elders presided over the whole body of the people, who, though dispersed in distant places, formed but one society.

At this time, some jealousy arose between Messrs. Kendrick and Ault; who had thus far united their labours, and were looked up to as leaders. A wish to have the pre-eminence appears to have actuated both parties. Mr Ault, who had probably been a principal instrument of raising an interest in Hinkley, wished to be the elder of that branch, without any dependance on the society at Barton. This was opposed by Mr. Kendrick; who, probably, feared a diminution of his own influence. The contest grew warm, and a separation ensued. Mr. Ault fixed his residence at Hinkley; and, for some time, preached and endeavoured to gather a church, unconnected with his former associates; with whom he was never afterwards re-united. But, after persevering for several years, his congregation dwindled away, and he gave up the attempt.

In the meantime, the preachers from Barton continued their labours at Hinkley, and were blest with encouraging success. Leaving their leaders to dispute for power, these zealous men diligently pursued their great object: and employed all their attention and all their energy in propagating the gospel of the grace of God among their ignorant and perishing neighbours. Nor did they confine their labours to the towns and villages; but often preached in the open air, in

Charnwood-Forest. Sometimes a hollow tree, and sometimes a broken rock, furnished them with pulpits: while the stones or hillocks supplied the hearers with seats. Many heard with attention: but others insulted the preachers; pelting them with stones and filth. Yet these good men were not in the least intimidated, or induced to relax in their exertions: for they had learnt to bear hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

The malice of the enemies of religion did not long confine itself to occasional insults: it soon commenced a more regular attack. The Barton independents availed themselves of the privilege, enjoyed, at that time, by all dissenters, of solemnizing their marriages amongst themselves: and Mr. John Aldridge was thus married to Miss Elizabeth Cooper. A gentleman in the neighbourhood, who had long distinguished himself by his enmity against the methodists, employed the church-warden, as his agent, to indict Mr. Aldridge, in the Spiritual court, for living in adultery with Miss Cooper. Such a cruel and base attempt to destroy the peace, and blast the reputation of a worthy family, excited the indignation of all good men. Dr. Turville, of Thurlaston, assisted Mr. Aldridge, on this trying occasion, with his advice and countenance: and, after a full investigation, the court declared, that the marriage was legal. The church-warden, fearing a prosecution for defamation, made ample satisfaction to the injured persons: and it was thought that the affair was concluded.

But this defeat only inflamed the rage of the principal instigator: who continued to take every opportunity of insulting Mr. Aldridge and his friends, by hooting at them

when they passed him in the streets, and inciting others to abuse them. One evening, as Mr. Aldridge, his wife, and several of their companions, were returning home from a social visit, they were met by a tumultuous rabble, headed by their implacable enemy. The unoffending Methodists were driven off the path, thrown down on the ground, and inhumanly kicked about by the infamous leader and his savage followers: and, at last, were compelled to shelter themselves from the fury of the assailants, in the house of a relative. This violent outrage obliged Mr. Aldridge to seek protection from the laws of his country, by commencing a prosecution against the principal offender: and the cause was brought to trial at the Leicester Assizes, Aug. 1751. All the influence that could be procured was employed on the side of the defendant: and the jury were overheard, during the trial, agreeing to return a verdict in his favour, whatever evidence might be brought against him. The prosecutor, on the contrary, rested his cause on notorious facts, proved by witnesses of unimpeachable characters; whose testimony was given in a manner so simple and yet so clear, as to gain immediate credit.* The judge observed, that it was impossible to weaken the proof, by any opposite evidence; and advised the offender to come to terms of accommodation with the prosecutor; naming a sum which he thought ought

* The manner in which Joseph Donisthorpe, who was one of the witnesses on this trial, introduced his testimony, made a solemn impression on the whole court. "I am sensible, my Lord," said he, "that I now stand before not only an earthly judge, but that I am also in the presence of the Judge of heaven; and being accountable hereafter for all I say, shall speak the truth." *G. B. Mag. Vol. I. p. 325.*

to be paid as a penalty. The defendant refused to comply with this proposal : but, after some consideration, agreed to pay a smaller sum ; which was accepted, and the case dismissed. Thus the equity of the judge defeated the wickedness of the jury ; of whose partiality, it is probable, he entertained some suspicion : and these harassed people were secured in the quiet enjoyment of their civil and religious rights. So important did they esteem this victory, and so gratefully did they acknowledge the signal interposition of Providence in the result, that the eighth day of August was annually observed by them as a day of thanksgiving, as long as the society continued united. It was spent in singing, preaching, and prayer, and closed with a feast of charity.

It is probable, that, when these honest men began to publish the glad tidings of salvation, they were not aware that it was necessary to have any other licence than the command of their great Master, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Their experience, however, had now taught them, that this would not secure them from the rage of wicked men. They, therefore, determined to claim the protection of the Act of Toleration : and Joseph Donisthorpe, John Whyatt, John Aldridge, Samuel Deacon, Francis Smith, and John Grimley, registered themselves, as dissenting ministers, at the quarter sessions at Leicester.

Protected thus by the laws of their country, and animated by an ardent love for immortal souls, they prosecuted their great design with increasing vigour and success. Mr. Samuel Follows, of Castle Donington, introduced them into that town ; where they very soon collected

numerous and attentive congregations. Curiosity brought several persons, from the adjacent village of Diseworth: who, being convinced of the importance of the great truths which they heard, were anxious to have them proclaimed to their neighbours. The ministers, willing to enter at every door which Providence opened for them, instantly complied with their wishes. They went to Diseworth: and commenced their labours in a weaver's shop. But this humble beginning soon led to important consequences. In a short time, a numerous society was formed: and, in 1752, a commodious meeting-house erected.

Among those who attended at Diseworth, were Mr. J Bradley of Whatton, and Mr. William Holmes of Kegworth. The former returned home from the first sermon so much impressed, that, on entering his apartment, he exclaimed to his wife, "Mary, it is not of works, at last!"—a plain indication, at once, of the state of his own mind, and of the doctrine which he had heard. Mr. Bradley afterwards removed to Kegworth; and was very instrumental in promoting the cause of religion in that town. Mr. Holmes had lately commenced business, and was a respectable young man. One Lord's-day morning, in the summer of 1753, he attended at the parish church of Kegworth, and heard a sermon, from Micah vi. 6—8. In the evening of the same day, he walked to Diseworth, and heard Mr. Grimley preach from the same text. The sermon, however, was entirely new; and both surprized and affected him. From that period, he attended regularly at Diseworth: and, after suffering considerable distress of mind, before the close of the year, found comfort in his Saviour.

A few other inhabitants of Kegworth attended

at Diseworth: and, feeling the value of the truths of the gospel, were desirous to bring them into their own neighbourhood. They even ventured to form a wish to build a house for God at Kegworth. Seven or eight of these zealous young converts met together, one evening, to consult on the subject. Though generally poor men, twenty guineas were soon cheerfully subscribed: and Mr. Bradley, who had purchased some land in the town, offered to accommodate them with a part of it. Thus encouraged, they ventured to proceed: and, to prevent expence, gave their personal labour, as well as their money, to the good design. The building being soon completed, was opened, June 15th, 1755, by Mr. Donisthorpe. The cause prospered; their numbers increased: and, in a short time, the whole debt was discharged.*

Mr. Dixon, as we have seen, when he left Barton, settled at Annesley Woodhouse, Nottinghamshire, where he raised a small congregation. But his conduct proving immoral, the people excluded him: and applied for ministerial aid to the Barton preachers. These indefatigable men readily engaged to supply them: and their labours were blest to the conversion of sinners. In 1755, a meeting-house was built at a neighbouring village, named Kirby-Woodhouse. Mr. Abraham Booth, and his parents, appear to have been among the first fruits of their ministry, in this place. Though then only twenty-two years of age, he joined these despised people, and soon became eminently useful.†

About the year 1753, preaching was introduced

* G. B. R. Vol. III. pp. 51, 52. G. B. Mag. Vol. I. p. 407.

† G. B. Mag. Vol. I. p. 407. G. B. Rep. Vol. II. p. 121.

into the populous town of Loughborough, by Mr. Thomas Hutchinson. Mr. Whyatt delivered the first discourse in that place, from Isai. liii. 6, in the dwelling-house of Mr. William Cheatle; who kindly opened his doors for the purpose. So few of the inhabitants were friendly to the cause, that it was with difficulty five signatures could be obtained, to a request for a licence for the place of worship. Yet a considerable number of the inhabitants attended ; and many heard with seriousness ; though the greatest number went with an avowed intent to ridicule and persecute. The mob collected round the house, in the time of service ; and endeavoured, by clamour and sometimes by the beating of drums, to interrupt the attention of the hearers. Often they proceeded further: and threw stones and dirt through the windows. Once they seized a woman, as she came out of the meeting ; and dragged her along a deep kennel, full of mire and filth, by the hair of her head : reviling her continually with the epithets of *raven* and *methodist*. The ministers endeavoured to check these violent proceedings, by an appeal to the magistrates: but a witness accidentally mistaking the date of one of these atrocities, this slip of memory was made the pretence of rejecting their appeal: and their enemies renewed their assaults with increased fury.. The rabble collected round the door of the court, and followed the friends of religion, with triumphant insult, through the town : so that they escaped with difficulty to their own houses. Foiled in this attempt, they employed an attorney, to seek redress in the higher courts; who sent a letter to the most active of the persecutors, stating the probable consequences of their violent conduct. An intimation of this nature, from a person of cha-

racter, put a stop to personal insults; and the enemies of religion confined themselves to hooting, shouting, and similar expressions of ill will. These harmless effusions of restrained malice were despised and neglected:—the ministers continued their labours, and the cause daily gained ground.*

SECT. 3.—*The Proceedings of the Barton Preachers, and their Associates, from their commencing Baptists to the Division into distinct Churches: or, from A.D. 1755 to A.D. 1760.*

THESE good men, when they first began to preach salvation by faith, appear to have entertained no design of forming a party. Their great object evidently was, to incite their careless neighbours, whom they saw perishing on every hand, to flee from the wrath to come. An union of object and similarity of spirit produced co-operation: and societies arose from their mutual zeal to promote each other's spiritual welfare. They continued to consider themselves members of the established church: and, from a principle of conscience, regularly attended her worship. But their application to religion naturally led them to acquire a more accurate acquaintance with divine subjects: and this knowledge produced and nourished dissatisfaction with the doctrine, the worship and the discipline of the church of England. Unmerited persecution heightened their disapprobation; and, at length, compelled them to declare themselves dissenters.

* G. B. Mag. Vol. I. p. 407. G. B. Rep. Vol. II. pp. 2, 3.

Yet, even then, they had their system to form. Unacquainted with the volumes of theology, unconcerned in the controversies among professors, and unknown, almost totally, to the more ancient dissenters, they had no guide but the Bible. That sacred book they carefully and impartially studied; and determined to make it the standard of their faith and the rule of their practice. From this volume, under the teachings of the Holy Spirit, they gradually corrected the errors which they had imbibed; and formed themselves into regular churches of Christ.

Their preachers had early conceived some doubts on the subject of baptism, which led them to appeal to their infallible directory. But their prejudices were not easily removed. They quickly discovered that the scripture mode of baptism was immersion; and resolved to practise it. For this purpose, a large tub was placed in their meeting-house; in which the ministers dipped their infants. This custom they seem to have maintained for several years.* At length, they were compelled to acknowledge, that the New Testament no more authorized the baptism of infants than it did sprinkling. They had flattered themselves, that the example of the blessed Saviour,† gave some countenance to their practice: but a more impartial examination convinced them, that there was not the least allusion to baptism in the whole transaction. They discovered that, "Jesus himself baptized not;" but "took children in his arms, put his hands on

* G. B. Mag. Vol. I. p. 358.—Mr. Josiah Thompson, who wrote an account of these people, in 1774, which he had collected from the parties themselves, says, "For about twelve years they practised infant baptism by immersion." J. T. MSS.

† Mark x. 16.

them, and blessed them." Determined to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he went," they removed their vessels for immersion; and brought their infants, in the time of public service, to the minister: who, taking them in his arms, pronounced an affectionate benediction on them; using, on this occasion, the words in which Aaron and his sons were instructed to bless the children of Israel. "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee, The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."* Suitable admonitions to the parents, and earnest and affectionate prayer for them and their offspring, concluded the solemn and interesting transaction. We have no account how long this practice continued: but, as it was no ways inconsistent with the principles of believers' baptism, it was, probably retained for some time after they adopted that practice.†

In proportion as the grounds of infant sprinkling vanished, the arguments for believers' baptism appeared the more conclusive. They found, that the New Testament not only required repentance and faith, as indispensable prerequisites to baptism; but also made it the duty of every one, who professed to repent and believe, to be baptized. Yielding, therefore, to the authority of scripture, and the dictates of conscience, they determined, after serious examination for several years, to obey the command of their Saviour; and personally to devote themselves to his service, in this sacred ordinance.—They were led to this conclusion, neither by reading the writings of the advocates of believers'

* Numb. vi. 22—27. † G. B. Mag. Vol. I. pp. 358—360.

baptism, nor by conversation with baptists: but simply by reading and studying the word of God.*

They were now baptists in sentiment: but, in reducing their creed to practice, a considerable difficulty occurred. None of their ministers had been baptized by immersion, on a profession of faith: and, therefore, according to their new views, they were all in an unbaptized state; and unqualified to administer the ordinance to others. If they had any acquaintance, at that time, with other baptists, either general or particular, it was very slight: and they felt no inclination to solicit their assistance. Indeed, had they applied to any of the regular ministers of that day, when discipline was more rigorously exercised than at present, it is probable, that, considering their obscure state and imperfect organization, they would have been refused. After much consideration, they had recourse to the expedient usual in such cases. It was agreed, that Mr. Donisthorpe should first baptize Mr. Kendrick, and then Mr. Kendrick should baptize him: after which, they should unite in administering the ordinance to the rest of their associates. This was accordingly performed, about the middle of November, 1755: when, between sixty and seventy of these professors thus solemnly devoted themselves to the service of their Saviour.†

* The writer, mentioned in the last note, observes, "In 1755, they adopted the sentiments of the baptists, both with respect to the subject and the mode of baptism. This change of sentiment arose, neither from reading any books on the subject, nor from conversation with any persons of that persuasion: but merely from searching the scriptures, and from thence being persuaded, that so had the Lord commanded." *J. T. MSS.*

† *G. B. Mag.* Vol. I. pp. 359, 360. *G. B. Rep.* Vol. I. pp. 52,

The adoption of believers' baptism involved these young professors in perplexities of a different nature. As they were all independents, and claimed the privilege of thinking and acting for themselves, it was not to be expected, that all would, at one time, arrive at the same conclusion. Several, in fact, who were members of their society, and sat down with them at the Lord's table, disapproved the opinion of the majority, and continued unbaptized. This did not, however, exclude them from communion; but they were permitted still to enjoy all their former privileges. It does not indeed appear, that, for some time, baptism was made a term of communion, or considered as giving a title to the fellowship of the church. Attention to it was urged on their hearers, as a duty required of them by the command of Christ; and they were earnestly pressed to prompt obedience. In some cases, it is pro-

249. Vol. II. p. 120. Vol. III. p. 53.—It has been seen, in the former part of this work, that Mr. Smyth and his friends experienced the same difficulty, as to obtaining a proper administrator; and adopted the same method. Thus, also, Mr. Roger Williams, and a few others, who, in the middle of the seventeenth century, founded the first baptist church in America, in a similar perplexity, appointed Mr. Holliman to baptize Mr. Williams; after which, Mr. Williams baptized Mr. Holliman and ten others. And, when a few pious Germans, residing in Pennsylvania, at the beginning of the last century, had, by reading the scriptures and mutual conversation, been convinced of the divine appointment of believers' baptism, and were unable to procure assistance from a regular baptist, they chose one of their number, by lot, to administer the ordinance to the rest: and thus laid the foundation of the party afterwards called *Tunkers* or *Dippers*. It is remarkable, that, in all these cases, so entirely distinct, and, probably, unknown to each other, the same means should have been used to restore the ordinance: and that the Barton people, who, it is almost certain, had never heard of any of these transactions, should adopt the same expedient *Supra, Vol. I. pp. 71, 82—85.* *Juiney's English Habi. Vol. I. p. 563.* *Bap. Mag. Vol. V. p. 333.*

bable, that their zeal misled them; and they were not sufficiently cautious in examining the characters of those whom they baptized: but being baptized gave the party no right to the other privileges of communion. Thus, after they became baptists, their society consisted of four distinct classes of members. The lowest were such as professed a concern for eternal things, who enjoyed a degree of fellowship, though they were neither admitted to baptism, nor the Lord's supper: the second comprised those who had been baptized, but were not communicants: unbaptized communicants composed the third: and the fourth, or highest class, consisted of baptized communicants. These classes, which appear to have partly arisen from their peculiar circumstances, and partly to have been borrowed from the Methodists, were maintained as long as these professors continued to act as one body; but were soon laid aside when they divided into distinct churches.*

This important change in the sentiments and practice of these people did not relax their exertions for the spread of the gospel, and the conversion of sinners; nor diminish their success. Preaching had not continued more than three years, in the dwelling-house at Loughborough, before the increase of regular hearers obliged them to look out for more spacious accommodations. Mr. Oldershaw, who was friendly to the cause, having a barn at liberty, offered to fit it up as a meeting-house, and let it to the congregation. The proposal being readily accepted, the proper alterations were made; and the preachers from Barton and Melbourn attended regularly every

* Gen. Bap. Mag. Vol. I. p. 360.

Lord's-day: besides conducting a week-day-evening meeting for prayer and exhortation.—The hearers still increased, and religion appeared to be daily extending its influence, when this rising interest received a check from the dreams of enthusiasm. A collar maker, from the Vale of Belvoir, who has since been known by the appellation of the Little Prophet, pretended to have received a commission from heaven, to lead the army of the saints to the valley of Jehoshaphat, to destroy Gog and Magog, and the whole host of the ungodly; and thus to introduce the Millennium. To uphold his claims, he began to make preparations for his proposed march, and actually nominated some of the principal officers who were to serve under his standard. When we consider the success which pretensions still more absurd have recently obtained, among persons who have enjoyed means of instruction far superior to those possessed by the friends of Loughborough, at this time, we shall not wonder that the Little Prophet deluded a few of the weaker members of the congregation. And it reflects no small honour on the memory of the preachers, whose spirits must have been warmed by persecution, and elevated by success, and who had borrowed little assistance from human learning, that they uniformly opposed this fanatic, and adhered steadily to the words of truth and soberness. Their firmness preserved many from being led away by this delusion: and the failure of one of the most remarkable predictions of the prophet completed his confusion, and sunk him into deserved contempt.*

The cause at Loughborough received a valuable

* G. B. Rep. Vol. II. pp. 3; 4.

addition, during this period, in Mr. William Parkinson, a respectable farmer of Quorndon. He had been awakened to a concern for the salvation of his soul, by conversing with a young man who had joined the new preachers. Mr. Parkinson long refused to attend these despised ministers, through fear of losing the countenance of his family, who were violently prejudiced against them. But, having settled at Quorndon, at a distance from his friends at Sawley in Derbyshire, he frequently went to spend the sabbath with them. One morning, passing through Kegworth for that purpose, he heard singing in the general baptist meeting-house ; and, being partial to that exercise, was induced to enter. Curiosity prompted him to hear the discourse, which was delivered by Mr. F. Smith, from that awful text, Prov. i. 24—28. This roused his fears, and caused him to attend occasionally on the labours of these zealous men ; though, for two years, under the influence of carnal pride, he went with great secrecy. The powerful application of our Saviour's declaration, “ Whosoever is ashamed of me and my words before men, of him will I be ashamed, before my Father and his holy angels,” constrained him, at last, to make an open and manly profession of his attachment to those whom he was compelled to esteem as the friends of the truth. His views of the scripture way of salvation growing more correct, and his soul obtaining peace in believing, he proposed himself to the society ; and was baptized May 8th, 1759. He continued long a valuable member, and a great support of the cause of Christ. Three of his brothers, and several branches of the family, following his example, successively joined genera

baptist churches ; and were eminently useful and honourable.*

The cause of religion prospered, for a short space, at Kegworth ; and the prospects were highly encouraging. Frequently upwards of five hundred persons attended their public worship ; and opposition vanished before them. But the scene soon changed. In their eagerness to spread the gospel, they were sometimes inattentive to the instruments they employed. A person was encouraged to preach, whose abilities were unequal to the sacred work, and whose conduct was irregular. This excited disgust in sensible observers, and prepared their minds for taking offence. Soon afterwards, considerable dissension arose on subjects of doctrine. Many openly espoused the tenets of Antinomianism : and the disputes were conducted with so much heat and animosity, that the society at Kegworth was dissolved. And, though the friends of truth and peace soon effected a re-union of many of the members ; yet not a few forsook the preachers, and adhered to the system which they had recently adopted.†

But while the cause was thus distracted at Kegworth, the seed which had been sown there was, in other places, bringing forth abundant fruit. Curiosity had led many persons from Leake, in Nottinghamshire, to hear the new preachers at Kegworth : divers of whom became deeply affected ; and, in a short time, heartily joined their society. These young converts frequently conversed with their neighbours on eternal subjects, and opened a meeting for prayer

* G. B. Rep. Vol. III. pp. 1—6.

† Gen. Bap. Mag. Vol. I. p. 408.

and exhortation at Leake. The clergy took the alarm at these strange proceedings; and a violent persecution commenced. But the dissenters applied to a magistrate; who honourably interfered, and obliged their enemies to make them compensation. Yet, though public outrage was suppressed, private malice continued to harass them: and often reduced them to circumstances that tried the sincerity of their attachment to the cause of their Redeemer.

Among these sufferers for the sake of a good conscience, the zealous and pious Mr. Nathaniel Bennett was justly distinguished. He had a large family, and depended for support chiefly on a farm which he rented. When he commenced baptist, some of the neighbouring clergy incensed his landlord against him: and the alternative was proposed to his choice, either to renounce his religious connections, or to quit all visible means of subsistence. Great as the sacrifice was, this good man did not hesitate; but cheerfully cast himself and his dependents on the care of Providence, rather than deny his Saviour or desert his friends. He was, accordingly, driven from his habitation, and compelled to seek a shelter where he could. For some time, his efforts appeared ineffectual. The little property which he had previously acquired, rapidly declined; and poverty seemed to approach with hasty steps: yet he still retained his dependence on God, and steadily adhered to the path of duty. Nor had he occasion to be ashamed of his confidence. He received, even in this life, an abundant compensation for all that he had forsaken for Christ; and finished his course with joy, in the happy anticipation of enjoying an inheritance that fadeth not away. The Lord has also been very gracious to

his offspring : many of whom are now walking honourably in the steps of their pious and worthy ancestor.

In the midst of this public and private opposition, the cause of vital religion continued to prosper at Leake ; and the number of hearers daily increased. It was soon found necessary to provide a larger place of worship. A suitable piece of ground for a meeting-house was obtained of Mr. Thomas Clark, who also generously accommodated the friends with a loan of one hundred pounds, to assist in the erection. All the influence that could be obtained by the enemies of religion, was vigorously exerted, to prevent the completion of this design ; but the zeal and perseverance of the baptists, under the blessing of heaven, surmounted all obstacles ; and a neat and commodious chapel was opened, in 1756 ; which added new vigour to their proceedings. Many attended the worship, from adjacent villages, and even from distant places. This naturally induced the preachers to visit them at their own homes ; and thus, in a short time, the gospel was introduced into many of the neighbouring districts.*

The labours of these ministers continued to be abundantly blest at Hinkley, and its environs. Among the first converts, in that town, were Mr. Thomas Perkins, afterwards an useful preacher, and Mr. John Shipman, who, for a long period, sustained the office of ruling elder in that church. They soon pushed their exertions into Warwickshire, and founded an interest in the vicinity of Longford, near Coventry. Robert Sheffield, a young member of the society at Diseworth, going

* G. B. Mag. Vol. I. pp. 405, 406, and P. I.

to work at Exhall, in that neighbourhood, boarded with a dissenting family of the independent persuasion. Being zealous to propagate his peculiar sentiments, he introduced them frequently in conversation ; and with such success, that a daughter of his host was persuaded to attend the preaching at Hinkley, though at the distance of eight or nine miles. After due examination, she renounced the doctrine of personal election, and cordially embraced the important truth, that "Jesus tasted death for every man." Her family were much grieved at this change ; and, after private expostulation had failed, proposed, for the purpose of fully discussing the points in debate, a meeting of the independent minister and his friends, with some of the leading men among the new preachers. These zealous men accepted the challenge with alacrity ; and the conference took place in the vestry of the independent meeting-house at Bedworth, near Exhall. But, on this occasion, these champions ventured out of their sphere. However able to propose the plain truths of the gospel to perishing sinners, they certainly were wholly unacquainted with the arts of controversy. They were, therefore, easily disconcerted, and driven to substitute clamour for argument. This imprudent encounter afforded, not only triumph to their enemies, but also a pretence to the rabble, to insult and persecute them. And the young woman, persisting in her adherence to her new principles, was discarded by her parents, and obliged to seek refuge among the friends at Hinkley and Barton. After some months, she returned on a visit to Exhall ; and succeeded in persuading her brother, with Mr. William Smith and his wife, and a few other neighbours, to attend at Hinkley.

Mr. W. Smith was soon convinced of the truth of these new doctrines: and, being a zealous man; and desirous to promote the eternal welfare of his neighbours, conversed freely on these important topics with any who would hear him. An uproar was quickly raised in the parish; and the vicar became alarmed. He sent for Mr. Smith; and held a long debate with him on the subject of salvation by faith. They parted, as disputants usually do, each confirmed in his own opinion. The next morning, the clergyman sent to inquire of Mr. Smith what he called himself, and with which class of dissenters he chose to rank. This, probably, was a point which the new convert himself had hardly settled: and, therefore, feeling no inclination to satisfy the curiosity of the inquirer, he abruptly replied to the servant who brought the message, "Tell your master, that I am a christian." The vicar, irritated by this laconic answer, sent back the servant to inform Mr. Smith, that, unless he refrained from conversing with the parishioners on the subject of religion, he might expect to suffer for his interference. But this village pope entirely mistook the character of his opponent. Mr. Smith was not to be deterred by threats from what he felt to be his duty; and indignantly returned, "Tell your master, that I regard neither him nor his persecution: for I mean to go to heaven myself, and to take all I can with me." This spirited message so increased the clergyman's wrath, that he took every opportunity of railing against these innovators. He carried his hostility into the pulpit, and made them and their heresies the constant themes of his public discourses. All this, however, had an effect directly contrary to the old vicar's wishes. The curiosity of his neigh-

bours was excited: and many went to hear what these babblers would say. Proselytes were daily made; and, in 1760, a house at Longford was licensed for preaching. This increased the rage of the enemies of the gospel, and the mob was encouraged to interrupt their worship.— Gross outrages were committed; but an appeal being made to the magistrate for protection, the fury of their persecutors was checked, and the cause was carried forwards with vigour and success.*

The interest at Melbourn had prospered in such a degree, that it was now considered as the second station of the society: Barton still holding the first place. Once a month, the Lord's supper was administered among these people; and, for the accommodation of the communicants, it was celebrated alternately at Barton and Melbourn. On these occasions, frequently more than one hundred members attended, from distant parts. It was impossible to accommodate such numbers with necessary refreshment, during their stay, at the expence of individuals; and it would have been disagreeable to have resorted to public-houses on so solemn a day: they, therefore, adopted a plan, which, as they thought, united economy and conveniency. A plain dinner was provided at a friend's house; and each person paid voluntarily, to the deacons, what he thought proper, towards the expence. The liberality of some supplied the penury of others; and the poor were usually entertained either gratuitously or on very easy terms. Sometimes the contributions exceeded the expence; and the surplus went to the common stock: at other times, they

* G. B. Mag. Vol. II. pp. 20—25, and P. I.

fell short; and the deficiency was supplied from the same fund. They had no suspicion of any illegality in their proceedings; and, therefore, took no care to conceal them. Indeed, many intelligent persons have thought, that, as no demand was made, nor profit sought, there was no breach of any statute; though an artful villain made this hospitable custom the means of involving them in very heavy expences.

A stranger settled at Melbourn, as a barber; and, by degrees, formed an acquaintance with the baptists. He regularly attended their meetings, appeared much affected under their sermons, and, at length, professed his desire to join their society. The overture was received with joy by these unsuspecting and sanguine people: and he was admitted to all their privileges. He attended these social dinners, and observed the manner of conducting them. Having obtained his purpose, he abruptly forsook the society, and lodged information against them for a breach of the excise laws. Several of the principal persons concerned, both at Barton and Melbourn, were, in consequence, summoned before the magistrates; and, on the oath of this barber only, condemned to pay a fine of fifty pounds for each place. Considering the poverty of the majority of their friends, and the exertions they were constantly making in building meeting-houses, and maintaining the cause, this heavy penalty was severely felt. But, though every means were used to procure a mitigation of the sentence, and several respectable characters kindly stepped forwards as their advocates, they were obliged to pay the uttermost farthing.*

* G. B. Mag. Vol. I. pp. 503—505.—Among others, the

This, certainly, was a heavy loss to the infant cause ; but a circumstance succeeded still more afflictive. Mr. Kendrick had, from the first rise of this people, been looked up to as a leader ; though, on several occasions, he had manifested too great a desire of power. But, about this time, several reports to the disadvantage of his moral character were circulated. These, at first, were neglected ; till they became so numerous, and assumed so serious an aspect, that the credit of the society required their investigation.— Several meetings of the preachers and principal members were held : and, though that unhappy man vehemently denied the truth of the accusations, yet the evidence against him was so clear, that the society was obliged to exclude him from their fellowship, and to dissolve all communion with him. What rendered the business still more unpleasant, was a circumstance which, till then,

Mayor of Derby wrote a letter on their behalf, signed by himself and four respectable gentlemen ; which we insert below, as it bears unsuspected evidence to the moral character of the parties.

" We, whose names are hereunto subscribed, are informed of an indictment against Mr. Thos. Robinson and Mr. Geo. Turner, both of Melbourn, in this county of Derby, for doing something contrary to the customs of the excise ; which we have reason to believe is more the effect of an oppressive spirit in those into whose hands they are fallen, than any fraud or design in the persons thus indicted.

" The two above persons transact a good deal of business in this town, and are well esteemed by all with whom they trade, as men of veracity and integrity ; and have always approved themselves good and loyal subjects to his majesty king George :—men whom we can heartily recommend to deserve the liberty the Act of Toleration intitled them to.

" We are, Gentlemen,

Your most humble servants,

SAMUEL CROMPTON, *Mayor of Derby,*

JOSEPH SMITH, JOHN BINGHAM,

ROBERT BAKEWELL, THOMAS MILNES."

Derby,
Aug. 27th. 1759.

had not been noticed. He had artfully got possession of the deeds of several meeting-houses: and the people were obliged to pay him a sum of money, to induce him to surrender those important documents. At last, after much trouble and disgrace, a total separation was effected.—The fury of wicked men may harass the church of God, and the power of tyrants may persecute his saints even unto death; but it is in the house of its friends, by the apostacy of its ministers, that the gospel receives its most deadly wounds, and its enemies obtain the most complete triumph.*

SECT. 4.—The Division of the Society into Five Churches: and their Progress from the Period of that Division to the Commencement of the New Connection: or, from A.D. 1760 to A.D. 1770.

THE unhappy and deplorable fall of Mr. Kendrick, not only exposed this rising interest to much ridicule and reproach, but left it without a head. The preachers, in general, eager on their great work of spreading the gospel, had left the management of their internal affairs, and the government of the society, in a great measure, to Mr. Kendrick: and he, possessing some literary advantages and considerable address, had ruled among them with almost dictatorial authority. When they lost him, they were, therefore, reduced to great perplexity. The cause had spread over a large tract of country, to places far distant from each other; and the number of members had greatly increased. No fewer than one hun-

* Gen. Bap. Mag. Vol. I. p. 408.

dred and sixty were in full communion; and vast crowds who attended their meetings were, in a greater or less degree, connected with them. To superintend the concerns of so extended and complicated a society, required persons of more experience and greater leisure than their preachers; who had enjoyed few opportunities of gaining general knowledge, and were closely engaged in labouring with their hands, for the support of their families.

Two of their preachers, however, possessed some advantages over their associates. Messrs. J. Grimley and A. Booth, though no less zealous in proclaiming the good news of salvation to perishing sinners, had applied themselves, in an especial manner, to the investigation of the nature of a church of Christ, and of the proper mode of discipline required in it: and had read some valuable works on that important subject. They, therefore, availed themselves of the confusion caused by Mr. Kendrick's exclusion, to propose the formation of distinct churches: which, being less extended, and under the eye of resident pastors, would, as they pleaded, more effectually promote the edification of every part, and the extension of the cause. After frequent discussion, it was agreed, that the whole body which had hitherto been united as one society, should be divided into five distinct and independent societies; which, from the principal place of meeting, were denominated, the Barton, Melbourn, Kegworth, Loughborough, and Kirby-Woodhouse churches. Among these congregations, the ministers were distributed, with as tender a regard as possible to the feelings of individuals, and the good of the whole. But, though thus divided and independent of each other, they

still maintained the most friendly intercourse. Monthly meetings of the ministers were held, for mutual advice and assistance: and quarterly conferences met, at each place in rotation; when one or two sermons were preached by the ministers of other churches. On these occasions, many of the members from a distance attended; and expressed much satisfaction and edification.

Let us now take a brief survey of these several churches, from the time of the division to the commencement of the New Connection.

Barton church included, at the period of the division, Barton, Hugglescote, Stanton, Markfield, Hinkley, and Longford. The ministers assigned to this society were, John Whyatt, of Barton, Samuel Deacon, of Ratby, and John Aldridge, of Hugglescote. For some time, the cause flourished, and the members increased.—The ordinance of the Lord's supper was administered monthly, at Barton and Hugglescote alternately; and though the distance at which many of the communicants lived was upwards of twenty miles, yet these solemnities were well attended. But this distance, and the increase of the members, rendered it necessary, in 1766, to divide the society into two churches: Hinkley and Longford forming one; and Barton, Hugglescote, and Ratby the other, over which Messrs. Whyatt, Deacon and Aldridge still remained pastors.

But differences on points of doctrine soon began to arise among the Barton friends, which caused considerable uneasiness. Mr. Aldridge's mind being much affected with the debates, and having previously entertained some doubts respecting his call to the ministry, he now totally declined the sacred work: though he continued an honourable private member of the church to

his death. This augmented the burden of the other two pastors, who were both labouring men; and depended on their own industry for their support. Though they had not only lost much time, but incurred considerable expence, by their ministerial engagements: yet they had hitherto received no remuneration from the society by which they were employed. It now occurred to some of the more considerate members, that their pastors ought to have some assistance. This reasonable suggestion was unanimously approved by the church; and immediate arrangements were made to carry it into effect. But some unpleasant circumstances in the conduct of Mr. Whyatt made it necessary, in 1770, after much external reproach and internal altercation, to exclude him from the society: when Mr. Deacon was left alone to serve this extended church. Yet, under all these discouragements, the cause gained ground: for, at the commencement of the New Connection, in 1770, this society consisted of one hundred and twenty members.

The members, who, in 1766, separated from Barton, and formed the church at *Hinkley* and *Longford*, amounted to fifty. Four years previous to this separation, Mr. W. Smith, of Longford, whom we have already mentioned, had begun to preach; and, soon after, Mr. George Hickling, who had removed from Costock in Nottinghamshire, engaged in the same sacred work. The labours of these two ministers, especially of the latter, were well approved by their friends; and, at the division, they were ordained joint pastors over the new church. The cause of Christ prospered in their hands; and, at the first baptism, twenty-five persons were added to the church. In 1763, a new meeting-house was built at Long-

ford ; and, in 1678, another was opened at Hinkley. Mr. G. Toone,* a valuable member of this church, who resided at Wolvey, had long been desirous of introducing the gospel to his neighbours. He was the first dissenter in the village, and encountered much opposition and reproach ; but unintimidated by difficulty, he opened his house for religious worship, in 1768 : which was generally conducted by Messrs. John and Richard Shipman, occasional preachers at Hinkley.—In 1770, the Hinkley, or, as it is termed in the Minutes of the Association, the Longford church, consisted of two pastors; one ruling elder, four deacons, and one hundred and seventy members: religion flourished and the hearers were numerous.

Melbourn was the second of the churches formed at the division, in 1760 ; and included Packington, Measham, Swannington and Tick-

* The attention of Mr. Toone to religious subjects was first excited by a serious remark, at the close of a letter on business, which he received from Mr. Bradley of Kegworth. This apparently trifling circumstance led to very important consequences. Under the divine blessing, it awakened this careless youth to earnest inquiry after the way of salvation, which issued in a surrender of himself to the Lord. He opened his house for preaching, and numbers attended who had never heard the gospel. In a short time, a commodious meeting-house was erected, in this dark village, which has since been enlarged : and, for many years, a numerous congregation have worshipped in it. A distinct church has, for some time, been formed at Wolvey, which now consists of upwards of eighty members. Many happy souls, there is good reason to believe, have already arrived in glory from this hill of Zion ; and many others are now travelling in the straight road that leads to eternal life.—What an encouragement to seize every proper occasion, either in conversation or correspondence, to drop a serious hint or introduce a religious observation ! *G. B. R. Vol. III. p. 228. Min. Ann. Asso. 1815.*

nall. About forty persons were, at first, united in this society : and Francis Smith and Thomas Perkins were ordained joint pastors over them. The ministers employed, on this occasion, were, Mr. A. Booth, who gave the charge ;* Mr. J. Grimley, who addressed the people ;† Messrs. Tarratt and Donisthorpe, who engaged in prayer; and Mr. J. Aldridge, who gave out the hymns. This event afforded great satisfaction to the people ; as they highly esteemed the abilities and characters of their pastors. These ministers, indeed, were well qualified to labour in concert : Mr. Perkins' discourses being peculiarly adapted to rouse the careless sinner to a sense of his danger, and to alarm his fears ; while Mr. Smith's disposition led him to draw the wounded soul, by the cords of love ; and, with the tenderest sympathy, to encourage him to seek peace, through faith in a crucified Saviour, whose affection and sufferings were the favourite themes of his public ministrations. With such overseers, the church spread itself on every side : and many were frequently added to its number. Some of these converts resided at Packington, where preaching had, for several years, been maintained, in the dwelling house of Richard Tompson. But, the hearers increasing, a large barn was engaged, in 1762, on a long lease ; and fitted up for public worship : which was soon well filled ; and many attended from distant places.—At Melbourn, also, the congregation augmented so much, that, in 1768, they were obliged to enlarge their meeting-house, at an expence of one hundred and twenty pounds : which they cheerfully raised by a subscription among themselves. About the

* From Acts xx. 18.

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† From 1. Thess. v. 12, 13.

same time, they introduced preaching at Worthington and Ticknall. At the former place, their success was small; and they soon relinquished the attempt: but, at the latter, several were added to the church; and preaching has continued there to the present time. In 1770, the church at Melbourn consisted of two pastors, two ruling elders, five deacons, and one hundred and sixty members: religion appeared flourishing, and many were waiting for admission.

Kegworth church included Castle-Donington, Diseworth, and numerous adjacent villages.—Over this church, Mr. N. Pickering, of Castle-Donington, and Mr. John Tarratt, of Kegworth, were ordained joint pastors. These ministers exerted themselves, with great diligence and signal success, in spreading the gospel among their benighted neighbours. Among other places at which they regularly preached, was Sawley, in Derbyshire. On May 8th, 1766, Mr. N. Pickering was preaching, in a dwelling house, in that village, when the curate of the parish, much intoxicated, came, at the head of a numerous mob, many of whom were in the same state as their leader; and, entering the room, ordered the preacher to cease, or they would put him in the stocks. Mr. Pickering, hoping to stop their violence, read his licence; but this had no effect. The curate seized him: and he, without resistance, suffered himself to be led out of the house to the stocks. But here the clergyman and his associates were too much overpowered by liquor to be able to complete their design; and Mr. Pickering quietly went home. The congregation had dispersed, amidst the insults of the drunken rabble: and the whole village was in an uproar. The bells of the church were rung, a drum was

beat about the streets, hand-bells were jingled in the ears of the baptists, dirt was thrown in their faces, and a bucket of blood was brought from a butcher's shop, to throw over them. Mr. Pickering, however, took an opportunity of acquainting the bishop of the diocese with the disgraceful conduct of the curate: and was assured, that he should receive a severe reprimand.*

Driven thus from Sawley, they turned their attention to Dale-Moor, where they introduced preaching with such success, that it soon became necessary to build a meeting-house. They, accordingly, erected one, at Little Hallam, in that neighbourhood; and, about the same time, opened several dwelling-houses, in different neighbouring villages, for public worship. This alarmed their enemies, who were persons of rank and influence: and when the baptists made application, at the quarter sessions, to register the places of worship, and for a preacher to take the oaths according to the Act of Toleration, the magistrates positively refused their request.—They then applied to the bishop, who instantly gave them an order under his own hand, to the registrarius of Litchfield, to make the entries, and grant them proper certificates: but that officer, probably influenced by the magistrates, refused to obey his lordship's injunctions.

The baptists were thus left, unprotected by the law, to the rage of the rabble; the insolence of which was heightened by the encouragement of their superiors. In this perplexity, they wrote

* One of the rabble, who rung the hand-bell and used every means to provoke some of the baptists to fight him, having continued in a state of drunken rage for several days, on crossing the ferry, while he was abusing his fellow passengers, fell out of the ferry boat and was drowned. *G. B. Mag. Vol. II. p. 56.*

for advice to Mr. Gilbert Boyce, a messenger of the baptized churches in Lincolnshire. He informed them of the existence of a society, in London, for the protection of the civil rights of dissenters; and advised them to lay their cause before it. They, accordingly, applied to the secretary of that society; but he seemed to discourage their application. But, having obtained the address of the chairman, Jasper Mauditt, esq. they ventured to direct a letter to him; to which an answer was quickly received, through the secretary; directing them to acquaint some respectable country attorney with the circumstances of the case, and to correspond with the committee of the London society, and act according to their instructions. They selected Mr. Foxcraft, of Nottingham, as their agent: and he received directions from the committee to make a regular application, at the next quarter sessions, in behalf of four meeting-houses and one minister. This he did: but his application was rejected with contempt. He sent an account of his ill success to London; and the committee immediately moved the court of King's-Bench, for a mandamus: which they readily obtained, and forwarded to Nottingham. At the next quarter sessions for the county of Derby, Mr. Foxcraft produced this mandamus, from the Lord Chief Justice, requiring, in the most authoritative language, the Derbyshire justices to register the four places, and the preacher; and to give the parties legal certificates of the fact. The reading of this order struck the whole bench of magistrates with astonishment: as the chairman had publicly declared, that he would sooner resign his office than consent to the wishes of the baptists; and his colleagues had boldly expressed their appro-

bation of his resolution. The hour of trial had now arrived : but, though mortification, disappointment and rage were visible in every countenance, neither the chairman nor his associates were willing to sacrifice their honours to their consistency. They submissively complied with the commands of their superiors ; and the baptists, at length, were placed under the protection of the laws of their country. This struggle cost the churches fifty pounds: but they gladly raised it ; and rejoiced at the happy termination of a contest with men formidable by their office and power.

We have no farther account of Kegworth church till the formation of the New Connection, in 1770 ; when it consisted of two pastors, three ruling elders, six deacons, and one hundred and eighty members. Religion was then very prosperous, and more than twenty candidates were waiting for baptism.

The church at *Loughborough* consisted, at the time of separation, of only fifteen members, who were scattered over Quorndon, Leake, Wymeswold, and many other adjacent villages. Messrs. J. Grimley and Joseph Donisthorpe were ordained joint pastors over this society ; and served it with zeal and diligence. Though they resided at the distance of nine miles from Loughborough, and fourteen from Leake, yet no obstacle could stop them in the pursuit of their great object, or prevent them from attending, at the appointed time and place, on every season of public worship. Their efforts were owned, by the great Head of the church : and produced the desired effects. In 1764, the building, fitted up by Mr. Oldershaw, became too small for the increasing congregation ; and it was enlarged to nearly twice its former

dimensions. The expence was one hundred and sixty pounds ; and was cheerfully defrayed by the free-will offerings of the hearers. About this period, Mr. Grimley removed to Loughborough, and devoted himself entirely to the work of the ministry : and, in two years afterwards, Mr. Donisthorpe also settled at the same place ; but continued his business, and was thus enabled to preach the gospel without pecuniary recompence. In 1766, preaching was introduced into Quorndon, a village three miles south of Loughborough : Mr. Robert Parkinson, who resided there, licensing his house for the purpose. Success crowned the attempt : and, in 1770, a neat, plain meeting-house was erected at Quorndon, which cost two hundred and seventy pounds.

Such, indeed, was the astonishing progress of the gospel, that this church, which, in 1760, consisted of only fifteen members, had, in 1770, increased to upwards of two hundred and forty ; besides upwards of thirty candidates, who were waiting for admission into their fellowship. It had then two pastors, one ruling elder, and five deacons : and the hearers were numerous. Well might they state to the Association, that religion was prosperous !—Perhaps this prosperity arose, in some degree, from the peculiar fitness of the joint pastors to co-operate in their sacred work. Mr. Donisthorpe arrested the attention of the careless sinner, and laid a solid foundation ; on which Mr. Grimley, by regulating the affairs of the church, and the practice and principles of its members, raised an useful superstructure. The one planted, and the other watered ; and the great Head of the church crowned their united labours with abundant success.

The small interest, at *Kirby-Woodhouse*, Not-

tinghamshire, formed the fifth part of the original division. Mr. Abraham Booth, who had for several years laboured at that place, took the oversight of this society, in 1760, though he was never ordained over it. His character was highly respected, and the people were much attached to him. But, in a few years, a change took place in his sentiments; which, after much deliberation, caused him to leave the general baptists; probably about the year 1765. He carried with him a warm esteem for the friends from whom he had separated, which he retained through the whole of his life; and which they as cordially returned. He was afterwards, for thirty-seven years, the highly respected and useful pastor of the particular baptist church in Little Prescott-street, London; and died in 1806. We have no further account of the society at Kirby-Woodhouse till 1774; when it consisted of only twenty-four members.

Thus we have seen the small society formed at Barton, in 1745, which, at its commencement, consisted of only seven members, gradually extending its limits and increasing its numbers, till, in 1770, it had become six respectable churches, which contained more than nine hundred and fifty members; and were served by ten ordained pastors, seven ruling elders, and twenty-four deacons; and spread over a considerable part of the counties of Leicester, Warwick, Derby and Nottingham.*—Let us pause here; and examine, as concisely as possible, the character, opinions, and discipline of these successful dissenters.

* G. B. Mag. Vol. I. p. 355. Vol. II. pp. 54—58 150—152.
—G. B. R. Vol. I. p. 52, Vol. pp. 3, 4. 120—125.—J. T. MSS—
Minutes of Annual Association of New Connection, 1770, and
Private Information.

SECT. 5.—*Observations on the Character—Mode of Preaching—Discipline—and Doctrines of the General Baptists in the Midland Counties, previous to the Formation of the New Connection.*

WHEN we reflect, that these zealous men were, generally, very illiterate—that they had no acquaintance with any other dissenters—and that, when they became seriously concerned to do the will of the Lord, they had every thing to learn, we cannot expect much systematic regularity, either in their principles or practices. Their early notions would, necessarily, be undigested and often incorrect: and it would not be till a lapse of years had enabled them to examine and mature their first ideas, that they could form a consistent scheme of doctrine and discipline.

Their progress in knowledge was also retarded, by a prejudice which too many of them entertained against the use of human compositions in the search of divine truth. So great was this prejudice, at one time, that when their more studious ministers had recourse to the works of some learned men, they thought it prudent to conceal their acquaintance with those authors from their hearers.* This unhappy dislike might arise, in part, from the ignorance and wickedness of the neighbouring clergy; who, it is probable, were the only learned men with whom they had much acquaintance: but it doubtless sprung from a more laudable source—their high opinion of the Bible, and their full persuasion that it contained all that was necessary for them to know in re-

* Mr. Grimley had studied Watt's Logic seven years, before his friends knew that he possessed such a book. *G. B. Rep. Vol. I. p. 50.*

ligious concerns. Yet, as they had every thing to discover and investigate, by their own study of the sacred oracles, their progress would be slow and irregular ; though the final results might be less tinctured with human alloy, than if they had availed themselves of the assistance of commentators or divines. It would not, therefore, perhaps, be useful, had we the means, to describe the various tenets or practices which they successively adopted and relinquished : it may suffice, to make a few general remarks on their character and sentiments.

The most striking feature in the character of these professors, both private members and ministers, was an earnestness in their religious pursuits, of which there are, at present, too few instances. They evidently esteemed religion as the most important object of their attention ; and, therefore, engaged in it with all their might. Deeply sensible of the unspeakable value of immortal souls, and strongly affected with the wonderful plan for the recovery of a lost world, as exhibited in the gospel, they suffered no considerations of prudence, ease or interest to relax their exertions or abate their ardour, in working out their own salvation, and promoting the salvation of their neighbours.

The private members evinced the truth of this observation, by the eagerness with which they seized every opportunity of attending the means of grace themselves, and of inducing others to accompany them. They regularly walked ten, fifteen, and sometimes twenty miles, to hear a sermon, or enjoy the ordinances of the gospel. Often, after a day of labour in their secular business, they would go eight miles to an evening meeting, and return after midnight to their habi-

tations ; even when they have been obliged to rise early the next morning to resume their daily toil. And this was not submitted to as a burden, or performed merely as a duty ; it was undertaken with alacrity, and enjoyed as a privilege.—Nor were they less anxious to promote the eternal interests of others. Nothing afforded them more pleasure, than to be made an instrument of awakening a sinner to flee from the wrath to come. They would spare neither pains nor time to instruct, encourage and assist one who was turning his face towards Zion.

The noble exertions which they made, in building places of worship, afforded the strongest proof of their zeal to spread the gospel. We have seen, in the foregoing pages, meeting-houses rise, one after another, in quick succession : and have observed that, wherever there was a prospect of the conversion of sinners being promoted by the building one, means were found to effect it.—When we consider, that almost all these professors were labouring men—that they had to encounter the opposition, not to expect the aid, of their wealthy neighbours—and that they had no Connection to assist their exertions, and had not yet discovered the method of laying the nation under contribution, by sending travelling mendicants from one extremity of the kingdom to the other—we are ready to wonder how they were able to accomplish these expensive objects. But, when we contemplate the spirit by which they were actuated, our astonishment changes into admiration. When we see the poor labourer devoting a part of his weekly earnings towards erecting a house for God ; and employing many hours, which ought to have been spent in repose, in labouring at the good work—when we learn,

that, on some occasions, these poor people have sold part of their little household furniture, and even the women have disposed of their wedding rings, rather than suffer the building to be interrupted—when we are told, that Mr. F. Smith, who then worked at his trade as a journeyman, contributed regularly eight-pence per week, towards the erection of the meeting-house at Melbourn; and that receiving, at that juncture, a legacy of five pounds left him by his father, he joyfully devoted this his whole fortune towards completing the good work; and are assured that his associates acted on the same principles—we cease to wonder: every thing is possible to men like these.*

But the most exemplary instances of disinterested zeal appeared, in the almost incredible exertions of the preachers. They were all labouring men, and had families dependant on their industry for daily support: yet they were instant in season and out of season; ready, at all times, to sacrifice their time, their repose, and even their property, to promote the cause in which they were engaged. They were, likewise, subject to heavy expences from the visits of their friends, on religious concerns, which were fre-

* This trait in their character is thus handsomely noticed by Mr. Thompson. “ It ought to be mentioned, to the honour of this people, though generally poor and in low circumstances, (there being but few persons of property among them) that, instead of putting their neighbours under annual contributions, they have, with a zeal proportionable to their own sense of the importance of the gospel, at their own expence, erected several commodious buildings, for the comfortable carrying on of the worship of God, without being burdensome to any one. To their power, yea, some would think beyond their power, they were willing of themselves to do the most generous things for the sake of the gospel.” J. T. MSS. 1774.

quent, and not seldom of long continuance. The cause, also, had become so extended, that the travelling from place to place made an addition to their toil, of which few can form any adequate idea. But an instance or two will convey more information on this interesting subject, than a long description.—Of Mr. F. Smith, of Melbourn, his biographer writes thus : “ For twenty years successively, he preached the gospel, without any recompence of a worldly nature, except a few small presents, in some of the latter of them, from a very small number of individuals. He frequently worked hard through the day ; then walked three, six, and sometimes ten miles, to preach in the evening ; and returned home afterwards, in order to pursue his daily labour next morning. This he sometimes did, two, three, or four times in the week. On the Lord’s-days, he had two or three times to preach, and generally to walk from ten to thirty miles or more. Every other Friday night, he, for years, met the ministers in conference : and, as they could not afford to lose their time in the day, to transact their business, six o’clock in the evening was the appointed hour of meeting. It was my father’s regular method to work hard till three o’clock in the afternoon ; and then walk to Barton, the place of meeting, which is not less than fourteen miles from Melbourn. Seldom had they finished their business till midnight ; when he returned home : sometimes so fatigued with his journey and the want of sleep, that, as I have heard him declare, it required the exercise of considerable resolution to prevent him from lying down to rest on the cold earth. This he did, without the most distant expectation of any pecuniary recompence ; and, indeed, without

desiring any.”* Respecting another of these ministers, Mr. S. Deacon, the pastor of the church at Barton, we are informed, that, “ During the early part of his ministry, his labour was almost incredible. On the Lord’s-day, he frequently travelled from twenty to forty miles on foot, and preached twice, and often three times. He has repeatedly walked from Ratby to Melbourn, a distance of twenty miles, on the Lord’s-day morning, and returned after evening service; not reaching his humble habitation till two or three o’clock the next morning: and this he has done, when he was obliged to go early to work the same morning as a labourer. In the week-days, also, he frequently walked, after a hard day’s-work, to Barton, Hugglescote, or Hinkley, to give an exhortation, or to attend the affairs of the society. The nearest of these is eight miles from Ratby; and Hinkley eleven: and he seldom tarried all night. This has been done, too, in winter, amidst rain, snow, and dangerous floods, through which he has often waded deeper than his knees, in the dark.”†

The other ministers being actuated by corresponding views, and placed in churches equally large, were called to similar labours:—the particulars just detailed may, therefore, be considered as a fair specimen of the toils to which these zealous and disinterested friends of mankind

* G. B. Mag. Vol. I. p. 356.

† G. B. Rep. Vol. VII. p. 52.—This active man frequently supplied Kirby-Woodhouse, in Nottinghamshire, thirty-nine miles from his dwelling; and had four shillings allowed for his compensation. On the same terms, he visited Ashford, in Derbyshire, upwards of fifty miles from Ratby: once he walked to London and back, and travelled with equal economy. *Ibid.*

subjected themselves, without either the expectation or desire of reward from men. Surely infidelity itself must admit, that they were not influenced by worldly motives; but really believed that the truths which they made such efforts to recommend, were essentially important to the welfare of their fellow men.

From persons in the circumstances in which these good men were placed, and destitute, as they generally were, of literary advantages, with neither disposition nor opportunity to acquire them, no finished harangues or display of oratory could be expected. They had one great object, which they constantly kept in view:—this was, to instruct ignorant sinners in the great plan of salvation, and to persuade them to embrace it. To this they directed all their efforts. Their hearers were chiefly persons unacquainted with divine things; and, therefore, it was necessary frequently to repeat and enforce the same great truths. Whatever text they read, their discourses generally turned on two grand topics:—the wretched and ruined state of man by nature, and the method of salvation by faith in Christ. This they called preaching the law and the gospel: and would have thought themselves culpable, had they delivered one sermon which did not explain these subjects. When a preacher, who was very popular and successful among them, was advised, by some of his friends, to vary the subjects of his discourse, he replied, with earnestness, “Perhaps there may be a soul present, who has never till to-day heard the law and the gospel preached: and should I waste the precious season in things comparatively of small importance, and neglect to acquaint him with his danger, and the

means of escape, the consequence may be dreadful.”*

Yet we are not to conclude, because these were the principal subjects of every discourse, that the discourses were always the same. These grand and interesting truths were the constant and favourite subjects of their meditation: they studied the scriptures incessantly, with a view to understand and defend them; and their minds were thus stored with a great variety of texts, confirming and illustrating them. They had considered them in all their bearings, and were furnished with many apt comparisons, to assist in their explanation. Possibly some of their similes would be thought, by modern divines, below the dignity of the pulpit: but these honest men never troubled themselves with cautions of that nature. Their own souls were deeply affected with the truths which they recommended to others: they spake out of the abundance of the heart; and were ardently desirous that the hearts of their hearers should be affected like their own. This imparted an earnestness to their delivery, and an animation to their addresses, that reached the heart, and fixed the attention. And, though their harangues frequently lasted nearly two hours, yet the audience shewed no symptoms of weariness; but cheerfully walked miles to attend their labours. In short, they have been well described by those who knew them, as “most immethodical, but most spirited, popular, and successful preachers.”

The individual character of these ministers certainly differed considerably. Some had stronger minds, and clearer conceptions than

* G. B. Rep. Vol. I. p. 251.

others: some were studious, and qualified to form plans; others active, and ready to execute them. Some were, by habit and disposition, sons of thunder; and others, sons of consolation. Some appeared to have been designed to break up the fallow ground, and sow the seed: while others were peculiarly fitted to shield the growing plant from injury, guard it against noxious weeds, and conduct it to maturity. Indeed their various tempers and qualifications seem to have been well suited, by the great Head of the church; from whom flow "diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit," successfully to co-operate in the great work to which they were called.

As private characters, they were diligent in business, honourable in their transactions with men, and conscientious in the discharge of their relative duties. It might be supposed, that their engagements as ministers, and earnestness in the concerns of religion, would have tempted them to have paid less attention to their families. But the circumstances and characters of many of their descendants are a sufficient reply to this insinuation; and afford satisfactory evidence, that neither their present nor future interests were neglected by their parents. And if, in any unhappy instance, the offspring of these ministers have degenerated from the piety of their ancestors, and sunk into less respectable circumstances; it may, we presume, be generally traced to want of energy in their fathers, who, like good old Eli, had not vigour sufficient to restrain their sons from making themselves vile.*

* The following testimony to the characters of these men, by a judicious writer, not connected with them, ought to be recorded.—“ From the conversation I have had with some of their

It may be expected, that we describe the discipline of these people, when they formed but one body: but as that was only a preparatory state, it will not be necessary to enlarge.*

In the constitution of their societies, they imitated, in a great measure, the methodists. When a few persons were awakened to a concern for salvation, in any place, they were formed into a society. To this society candidates were admitted, on probation, for six months, before they were

ministers, they appear to be persons of a very serious spirit, and a good understanding: and, sensible of the disadvantages which they lie under for want of a learned education, they are the more unwearied in searching the scriptures, and zealous in pursuing the great end of the christian ministry—the winning of souls to Christ, and to the love of truth and goodness. They are thoroughly acquainted with the principles of religious liberty, and established in them: and have all heartily concurred in the late application to parliament for relief, in the affair of subscription to the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England. Some of their letters, which I have received on that subject, do honour to the goodness of their hearts, and the soundness of their understandings.” *Thompson's MSS 1774.*

* We have seen already, that the Leicestershire general baptists availed themselves of the right, then enjoyed by all dissenters, of solemnizing marriages among themselves. (*Supra, p 22*) The Marriage Covenant, used by them, differing considerably from the one used, on the same occasion, by the general baptists of the seventeenth century; (*See Vol. I p. 450*) and conveying a distinct idea of their mode of proceeding; we insert the instrument signed at the marriage of Mr. Francis Smith, of Melbourn.

“ It having been publicly declared, in three several meetings of a congregation of Protestant Dissenters, called Independents, in their licensed meeting-house at Melbourn, in the county of Derby; that there is a marriage intended between Francis Smith, of the parish of Melbourn, and in the county of Derby, bachelor, and Elizabeth Toone, of the parish and county aforesaid, spinster: which publication being agreeable (not only to the just and holy law of God, but also) to the good and wholesome laws of the land; in order that every one concerned may have the opportunity of making all suitable enquiry for his satisfaction, and that nothing may be done clandestinely. And upon due enquiry and deliberate consideration thereof, by the said con-

considered as complete members of the union. The certificate of fellowship was a ticket, given to each candidate, which was changed every six months. If any thing transpired to the disadvantage of a member which could not be satis-

gregation, it is by them allowed, there appearing no reason for objection, they both appearing clear of all others, and having also free consent of all persons, whether relations or others.

Now these are to certify all whom it may concern, that for the accomplishing of their said marriage, they, the said Francis Smith and Elizabeth Toone, did, this twentieth day of August, one thousand seven hundred and fifty-three, appear in a public assembly of the aforesaid congregation and others, met together for that purpose, in their meeting-house aforesaid; and in a solemn manner, he, the said Francis Smith, standing up and taking the said Elizabeth Toone by the hand (she also standing up) did publicly declare as followeth, viz. "Brethren and sisters in the fear of the Lord, and in the presence of this assembly, whom I desire to be my witnesses, that I, Francis Smith, take this our dear sister Elizabeth Toone, to be my lawful wife; promising, through divine assistance, to be unto her a faithful and loving husband, till it shall please the Lord by death to separate us."

And then and there in the said assembly, she, the said Elizabeth Toone, in like manner taking him the said Francis Smith by the hand, did likewise publicly declare as followeth, viz. "Brethren and sisters, in the fear of the Lord, and in the presence of this assembly, whom I desire to be my witnesses, that I, Elizabeth Toone, take this our dear brother Francis Smith to be my lawful husband, promising, through divine assistance, to be unto him a faithful and loving wife, till it shall please the Lord by death to separate us."

And the said Francis Smith and Elizabeth Toone, as a further confirmation thereof, and in testimony thereunto, did then and there set their hands and seals.

Francis Smith

Elizabeth Smith.

We, whose names are hereunto subscribed, (being present amongst others) at the solemnization of the above marriage and subscription, in the manner aforesaid, as witnesses thereunto, have also to these presents subscribed our names, the day and year above written.

ABRAHAM BOOTH, WILLIAM KENDRICK,	NATHANIEL PICKERING, JOSEPH DONISTHORPE, &c. G. B. Mag. Vol. I. p. 453.
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factorily explained, he was excluded from their communion, by refusing him a ticket.—In order to defray the necessary expences, each member was required to make a monthly subscription, according to his ability : and two stewards were appointed to receive and apply these contributions. But, in order to preserve the peace of families, it was directed, that no wife, or husband, or child, whose partner or parent did not belong to the society, should give it any pecuniary support, without the consent of their connections. To carry these regulations into effect, a weekly meeting was held for prayer and exhortation ; and a monthly one, for transacting the pecuniary and temporal concerns of the society.

The supreme controul over all these societies, as long as they continued to act as one body, was placed in the weekly conference of the ministers; which, for some time, assembled always at Barton ; and afterwards alternately at Barton and Hugglescote. At this meeting, the places at which the preachers were to labour on the ensuing Lord's-day were appointed—persons were invited to assist in the work of the ministry—rules were made for the people, and laws enacted for the societies—and the general operations of the whole machine were directed. As long as Mr. Kendrick maintained his character with the people, he influenced these conferences at his will : the other ministers were little more than the executors of his arrangements, and the people had scarcely any share in the government.*—

* As a specimen of the lofty tone assumed by this synod, we insert the following extract from the preamble to a code of laws, which they enacted for regulating the society at Melbourn.—Having stated the advantages resulting from uniting together in societies, they proceed—"Therefore having met together at our

When he was excluded, a division of this body ensued ; and the private members obtained that ascendancy in the conduct of the concerns of the church, to which they are certainly entitled by the principles of the New Testament.

The doctrinal tenets of these professors were long in a state of regular improvement. When they were first awakened to attention to religious subjects, they were almost totally unacquainted with the truths of christianity : and it was only by a constant and diligent perusal of the scriptures, that they gradually formed a system of faith. Yet there were some important doctrines, which they early embraced and steadily maintained: which formed, as it were, the foundation of their subsequent opinions. Such were, the ruined state of man by nature; and full and free justification by grace through faith. This, as we have seen, was the favourite and the constant subject of all their discourses. The universality of the redemption purchased by the death of Christ, appears also to have been early and zealously asserted. But it is needless to enlarge here, as their sentiments, on the most important

church at Barton, and having the societies in our care, we there came to this resolution, to establish such rules among them with whom we are concerned, as appear to be to the glory of God and the good of souls. And we have proved, even to a demonstration, that if there be not very strict economy in such matters, our labours will be rendered useless and unprofitable.—Knowing these things, we expect that all who join themselves to us, or are already joined in our society, do consent to the following articles.”

G. B. Mag. Vol. I. p. 364.—It is most probable, that Mr. Kendrick’s wish to lord it over his brethren caused this pontifical language to be adopted ; and that the rest acquiesced, in deference to him. All the conduct of the other preachers demonstrates, that neither interest nor ambition influenced them ; but a sincere wish to promote the salvation of immortal souls.

points of doctrine, which had then attained a degree of maturity, will be fully explained when we come to state the principles on which the New Connection was formed. It will be sufficient, at present, to hint, that they then affirmed—the fall of man—the depravity of human nature—the perpetual obligation of the moral law—the divinity and humanity of Christ—the fulness, freeness and universality of the atonement made by his death—sanctification by the Holy Spirit—the necessity of regeneration and holiness—and believers' baptism.*

CHAP. II.

THE RISE OF THE GENERAL BAPTISTS IN THE NORTHERN DISTRICT, AND THEIR PROGRESS, TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE NEW CONNECTION.

SECT. 1.—*Mr. Dan Taylor begins to preach—forsakes the Methodists—settles at Wadsworth—turns Baptist—travels in quest of General Baptists, and is baptized.*

THE General Baptist' cause, in the northern district of the kingdom, commenced, in the year 1762, in the neighbourhood of Halifax, in the

* G. B. Mag. Vol. I. pp. 326, 356, 361, 362, 401.—Vol. II. p. 20.—G. B. Rep. vol. I. pp. 53, 249—251.—J. T. MSS.—P. I.—Minutes of Ann. Ass. 1770.

West Riding of Yorkshire. There were then but few professors in that town : a church of the old presbyterians, and a small independent interest, being the only dissenting societies that existed. The particular baptists were, indeed, attempting to gather a congregation ; but, it was not till long after this period, that they succeeded in establishing a church. The methodists, also, had, for several years, maintained a small society in the town ; and were actively employed, in its vicinity. With these, Mr. Dan Taylor, who was afterwards the instrument of founding the general baptist cause in those parts, had been, for some time, connected. He was then a young man, being born in 1738 : but possessing good natural abilities and an intrepid temper, and being zealous in the cause of religion, he had, for more than a year, engaged in visiting the sick, and in leading prayer-meetings. In these exercises he was so acceptable, that he was urged to attempt to preach. He yielded to the wishes of his friends ; and delivered his first sermon in a dwelling-house at Hipperholme, not far from Halifax, in Sept. 1761. His occasional labours were highly encouraged, by the leading men among the Yorkshire methodists ; and they were very anxious that he should visit Mr. Wesley, and enter regularly into the ministry, as a travelling preacher. But he did not approve of many things in their order and discipline ; and was not satisfied with their manner of explaining some points of doctrine which he thought of essential importance. He, therefore, declined forming any closer engagements : and, towards the Midsummer of 1762, entirely broke all connection with them.

About the same time, four persons in the neighbourhood of Heptonstall, a village nine

miles west of Halifax, left the methodists, for nearly the same reasons which had induced Mr. Taylor to forsake them. Their names were, John Slater, John Parker, William Crossley, and a female whose surname cannot be recovered. These seceders, knowing Mr. Taylor's state of mind, invited him to preach for them; with which he readily complied. He commenced his public labours, in connection with them, during the summer; and preached, for some months, in the open air, under a tree, at a place called The Nook, in the township of Wadsworth, about a mile from Heptonstall. Though the prospect was very discouraging, the country excessively wild, and the inhabitants very rough and unpolished, he determined, after a short trial, to make an attempt to introduce the gospel among them; and accordingly, at Michaelmas, 1762, settled at Wadsworth.

But winter approaching, it became necessary to provide some more commodious place of worship: and they took a house, in Wadsworth-lanes, which they fitted up for preaching, by taking up part of the chamber floor, and erecting a pulpit; so that the remaining part served as a gallery. They registered this house, under the Act of Toleration, and opened it, in the autumn of the same year. Mr. Taylor occupied it as a school during the week; and, meeting with encouragement as a tutor, was greatly assisted in carrying forwards the cause of religion: his friends, though zealous and affectionate, not being in circumstances to contribute much to his support.

Though these young professors had left the methodists through dissatisfaction with their discipline and doctrine, yet they had not formed any system for themselves. They now found it

necessary to determine upon some plan of church order, and some principles of doctrine, on which they could unite to support the cause of their Redeemer. Among other things that became the subject of enquiry, on this occasion, was baptism. Mr. Taylor had occasionally paid some attention to this important branch of christian duty, in the previous years of his religious course; but he now seriously endeavoured to learn the will of his divine Master respecting it. With this view, he read the scriptures carefully, and consulted the best authors on both sides of the controversy. The result was, a complete conviction, that believers' baptism by immersion was the appointment of Christ, and the practice of his apostles. John Slater, also, became decidedly of this opinion: and several other of the friends inclined to adopt it.

Mr. Taylor immediately resolved, without consulting with flesh and blood, to obey what he believed to be the command of his Saviour. He applied to several particular baptist ministers for baptism: but, though they expressed their firm persuasion of his real christianity, and even were well satisfied of his call to the ministry, yet they all declined to baptize him. They knew that he openly maintained, that the Lord Jesus tasted death for every man, and made a propitiation for the sins of the whole world: and this circumstance, in their judgment, rendered it improper for them to comply with his request. One of these ministers, however, kindly informed him of some baptists, at Boston, in Lincolnshire, under the pastoral care of a Mr. Thompson, who, as he believed, were nearly of Mr. Taylor's sentiments.—This appears to have been the first intimation that he received of the existence of any other

general baptists besides himself and his few friends.

Though the distance was great, not less than one hundred and twenty miles, and many serious obstacles presented themselves, this ardent searcher after truth, who was not easily frightened, determined to visit Mr. Thompson: and his friend, J. Slater, with equal affection and zeal, resolved to accompany him. They accordingly set out, on foot, on the morning of Friday, February 11th, 1763; and travelled on till night overtook them; when they found themselves in a field surrounded with water, and unable to discover their way. Perceiving a hay-rick near, they took shelter under it: and having commended themselves to the divine protection, in solemn prayer, they laid down and slept securely till the morning. They arose refreshed; and going towards arrived, towards night, at a place about eight miles beyond Gamston in Nottinghamshire; where they stopt for some refreshment. Making inquiries here on the subject of their journey, they were agreeably surprized to learn, that there was a society of general baptists at Gamston, and that a deacon of that church dwelt in the village where they then were. To him they immediately went; and, informing him of the object of their journey, requested some information respecting the church at Gamston: but he received them very coolly, gave short answers to their questions, and directed them to a neighbouring public-house.

The next morning, being the Lord's day, they returned to Gamston; and arrived at the meeting-house, just as the morning service was concluding. In the afternoon, Mr. Dossey preached; and, when he came down from the pulpit, the travel-

lers introduced themselves to his notice. He entered into friendly conversation with them and invited them to his house. Here they spent the three following days; and had much discourse with Mr. Jeffries the pastor, and other principal members of the church. This gave them an opportunity of giving that minister full satisfaction respecting their character and views: and on the Wednesday, he baptized Mr. Taylor in the river, near Gamston. Mr. Slater declined being baptized, at the same time, out of affection for his fellow traveller; choosing to receive the ordinance from him, rather than from any other minister.

After their return to Wadsworth, Mr. Taylor resumed his great work of preaching the gospel, with increased zeal and success. He delivered several public discourses to explain and enforce believers' baptism; and stood ready to defend his principles against all opposers. In a short time, he baptized his friend Slater with several others: and a great degree of attention to the subject was excited throughout the country.

SECT. 2.—*The Wadsworth Friends join the Lincolnshire Association—unite as a Church—build a Meeting-house—prosper—institute Experience meetings.—Their State at the Commencement of the New Connection.*

DURING his late excursion, Mr. D. Taylor had learnt many particulars respecting the Lincolnshire general baptists, with whom the church at Gamston was connected. He was informed, that an union subsisted among the various societies of

the same faith; that the representatives of these churches held annually an association to consult on the concerns of the cause at large; and, that, this meeting would be held at Lincoln, in May, 1763. As he stood alone in Yorkshire, he was anxious to form a connection with other ministers whose sentiments agreed with his own, and determined to attend this meeting. He accordingly went, and was kindly received. From this time, he was considered as a member of that association; and was employed by them on various public occasions. Here too he formed an intimacy with Mr. W. Thompson of Boston, which continued till that worthy christian was called to his reward.—His new friend invited him to make a short tour with him, in which he introduced him to Boston and various other churches in Lincolnshire.

Mr. Thompson accompanied Mr. Taylor to Wadsworth; where he baptized several persons and administered the Lord's supper: and fourteen of these professors united as a regular church. Mr. Taylor was soon after called to the pastoral office over this small society; but was not ordained till the autumn of 1763. On that occasion, Mr. Gilbert Boyce, a messenger of the baptized churches in Lincolnshire, and pastor of the general baptist church at Coningsby, and Mr. Dossey, assistant preacher at Gamston, were invited; when Mr. Boyce addressed the minister, from 1 Tim. iii. 1.

Thus the first general baptist church in Yorkshire was formed and organized. The pastor and his friends exerted themselves to the utmost, both to promote the interest in their own society, and to carry the gospel into the dark villages around them. The blessing of God attended their labours; the hearers increased, and members were

regularly added to the church. The house which they occupied as a place of worship, soon became too small to accommodate the congregation: and, in the following year, 1764, they were encouraged to build a meeting-house. This was erected on the side of a steep rocky declivity, fitly denominated a cliff, that formerly had been covered with the birch tree, and thence obtained the name of *Birchcliff*, which it afterwards gave to the church. Thus accommodated, the cause continued to prosper. Meetings for prayer and religious conversation were established, in various places of the neighbourhood: and several of the members began to be very useful in conducting them. This year, also, Mr. Taylor attended the Lincolnshire association; and, after his return, took a journey in the midland counties, to collect for the meeting-house, just erected at Birchcliff.

During this excursion, he gained the first intelligence of the Leicestershire general baptists: and had a short interview with Mr. Hutchinson of Loughborough. Though this interview lasted scarcely half an hour, it afforded him great pleasure, and gave him a good opinion of those christians. He took every opportunity during the remainder of that journey, of enquiring respecting their principles and character: and the result was, a persuasion that they were friends to the fundamental truths of the gospel; and, as a body, respectable in their conduct. He was thus induced to cultivate an acquaintance with their ministers, and to introduce them to the notice of the Lincolnshire association. This he had an opportunity of doing at Midsummer, 1765, when he attended that association; and was deputed, as its representative, to the gene-

ral assembly in London. He again went to the general assembly, in 1767, in the room of Mr. W. Thompson; who was appointed as the representative of the Lincolnshire association, but could not undertake the journey.

Mr. Taylor continued to labour diligently in his sacred work, and enjoyed an encouraging degree of success. Under the blessing of heaven on his exertions, an attention to religion was excited, which afterwards produced the happiest effects. His friends heartily seconded the endeavours of their pastor, by seizing every opportunity of inducing their neighbours to attend the preaching of the word, as well as by encouraging and directing such as appeared to be the subjects of serious impressions. With this view, each member of the church made it a point of duty to endeavour to bring one careless sinner under the sound of the gospel, and to use every scriptural method to engage him to embrace it. And when this happy end had, in one instance, been attained, and the object of his cares had enrolled himself among the followers of Christ; he looked about again for another wandering sheep, that he might endeavour to bring him also into the fold of the church.

It was during the period of which we are treating, that the Birchcliff church adopted a practice, in which they have been imitated by most of the general baptist societies that have since been formed in Yorkshire:—the holding of *Experience Meetings*, as they are usually styled. The members of this church, previous to the formation of the New Connection, were divided into five parts, according to the proximity of their habitations; and to each of these divisions, a person, who was judged qualified by his piety

and experience, was appointed, as a leader. The members included in each part met weekly, at one of their houses ; and any of their neighbours, who desired to engage in the cause of Christ, and wished to obtain religious knowledge, was also encouraged to attend. The meetings generally commenced with singing and prayer. When this exercise was concluded, the company all sat down ; and the leader declared, in a few words, the state of his own mind, as to the concerns of religion, since the last opportunity ; his trials and supports, his hopes and his fears, his struggles against inward and outward enemies, and his advancement or decline in the christian course. When he had said what he esteemed proper and necessary respecting himself, he requested each of the friends present, in rotation as they were seated, to give a similar statement of his experience; and made such observations, and offered such advice and cautions, as the circumstances of each might seem to require. After he had gone round, the meeting closed with prayer and thanksgiving, suitable to the particulars which had transpired.—The leaders of these divisions met together every six weeks, for mutual communication and assistance. At this leaders' meeting, as it was called, the minister always was requested to be present : even when he was not a leader.*

* The Yorkshire churches do not pretend, that experience meetings are expressly commanded in the New Testament ; but suppose that they may be included in the general canon, "Let all things be done unto edifying." They wish not, therefore, to censure those who disapprove of them. "I am sure," says one of their aged ministers, "that these meetings are right ; but I am equally sure that I have no right to command my fellow-christians to attend such meetings. I am extremely certain, that such meetings, if properly conducted, are very useful ; but I am as perfectly persuaded, that there are many valuable christians,

The Birchcliff church, likewise, at this time, held meetings for discipline every six weeks; "at which they made it a rule for all the members to attend;" and, once a quarter, a sermon was preached to the members only, on some peculiar points of discipline.

The pastor and his people thus striving together, the cause prospered in their hands: and additions to their society were frequent. At the commencement of the New Connection, in 1770, this church consisted of sixty-nine members, their public services were well attended, many appeared to be awakened, and religion seemed to flourish.*

The discipline exercised in this church, during the interval which has just passed under our review, was on the principles of independency. But it may be easily supposed, that, though they were in a state of progressive improvement, they could not, in the short space of seven years, have matured a very perfect system. As far as they understood the will of the great Head of the church, they endeavoured to regulate the concerns of their society, according to his precepts; and to call no man master on earth. The same remark applies to their doctrinal sentiments.—But it is unnecessary to pursue the subject at present, as we shall have a more proper occasion to enlarge on these topics, when we come to state the principles on which the New Connection was formed.

both ministers and others, who may not approve of them, and who never attend them. I wish to be among the first in shewing perfect friendship to those who think and act differently from me."—*J. T.'s Memoirs of his own Life.*

* G. B. Rep. Vol. II. p. 276. Min. of Lincolnshire Association, 1764, 1765, 1767. Min. of Ann. Asso. 1770, and Private Information.

CHAP. III.

*THE HISTORY, FROM THE CLOSE OF THE
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, TO THE COMMENCE-
MENT OF THE NEW CONNECTION, OF THOSE
CHURCHES WHICH, THOUGH PREVIOUSLY UNITED
TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, WERE INCLUDED
IN THE NEW CONNECTION, AT ITS FORMA-
TION.*

SECT. 1.—The Proceedings of the General Baptist Church, now assembling in Church-lane, Whitechapel, from the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century, to the Settlement of Mr. Randall over it.

BESIDES these churches in the midland and northern counties, of the rise of which we have given some account in the preceding pages, several ancient congregations of general baptists united in forming the New Connection. These were, the societies which assembled—in Church-lane, Whitechapel—in the Park, Southwark—at Boston, and at Fleet, in Lincolnshire—and a few small churches in Kent and Essex. It will be proper to continue, from the close of the first volume, as distinctly as we can, the account of the congregations in London and Lincolnshire: but of the societies in Essex and Kent, which soon fell off from the union, a brief notice may be sufficient.

We have already seen that the society which now meets in Church-lane, Whitechapel, originally assembled on Tower-hill, under the care of Mr. S. Loveday; and that his successor, in

the pastoral office, was Mr. J. Maulden ; under whose ministry the church removed to Rupert-street, Goodman's-fields, where we left it, at the close of our former volume, in a peaceful state.*

The venerable John Maulden continued to preside over this society, with diligence and success, till about 1710, when he embraced the principles of the Sabbatarians. In consequence of this change in his sentiments, he left his former connection, and united with the church of Sabbatarian general baptists, which has now for more than a century assembled in Mill Yard. His character and abilities procured him a welcome reception among his new friends, by whom he was soon chosen to the office of joint pastor with Mr. Savage. He did not long retain that situation, as he was called away by death in February, 1714 ; at the advanced age of seventy years.†

Mr. Maulden, during the twenty-six years of his connection with this church, appears to have been an honourable christian, and a respectable and useful minister. He published three pieces : 1. "The Pious Young Man's Guide :" a compendious and useful catechism, in the form of a conversation between a father and his son. 2. "A Threefold Dialogue :" on free grace, baptism, and the sabbath. 3. "Imperfections discovered :" in which he laments the little concern which professors display for real vital religion, and their

* See Vol. I. pp. 168, 251, and 335.

† We have not seen any record of the exact date of Mr. Maulden's leaving the church in Goodman's-fields. He was pastor of it in December 1709 ; though it appears that he had embraced the Sabbatarian principles before 1708. In 1712, the church was under the pastoral care of Lewis Douglas. *W.A.C.B. 1709 and 1712.—Maulden's Threefold Dialogue, 1708.*

heats and divisions concerning points of less importance.*

Mr. John Maulden, probably a son of this minister, was for many years a worthy and active member of this church. Though he was never called to the pastoral office, yet he frequently preached for that society : and as they solicited his service on various public occasions, it is probable that his labours were well approved, both by his friends and the public.†

After Mr. Maulden had left the church in Goodman's-fields, Mr. Lewis Douglas was called to the pastoral office over it. We have not the exact date of his ordination, but it was previous to 1712. In that year, this church removed to a meeting-house in Virginia-street, Ratcliff-highway, which had become vacant by the dissolution of the church that had long occupied it, under the care of Mr. Isaac Lamb.‡ What induced Mr. Douglas and his friends to leave a place of worship which they had so recently built, cannot

* Crosby, Vol. III. p. 132.

† Church Lane Records, from 1720 to 1744.—Though Mr. D'Assigny calls the father "a Shoe-maker;" yet the son appears to have been a man of property.

‡ The church under Mr. Isaac Lamb has generally been classed with the particular baptists; but the following facts render the case doubtful.—Mr. Isaac Lamb was the son of Mr. Thomas Lamb, of Bell-alley, a zealous general baptist.—The society of which Mr. I. Lamb was pastor was reckoned as a sister-church by the general baptist churches in London; and members were recommended from it to them, and from them to it, as was usual among churches of the same faith—When Mr. I. Lamb's church dissolved, most of the members went in a body, and joined the general baptist church in Paul's-alley: and Mr. H. Burroughs, who had been a deacon in the former society, was admitted to the same office in the latter. His son, Joseph Burroughs, was, for forty-four years, the pastor of the church in Paul's-alley. *W. A. C. B.* 1688, 1695.—*Crosby, Vol. III. p. 101.* —*Wilson, Vol. III. pp. 231, 249.*

now be ascertained ; as the records of that society which remain, are in a very mutilated state, and commence only in 1720.

There appears to have been, about this time, another church of general baptists, in Goodman's-fields ; which was successively under the care of Mr. Jemmett and Mr. Beacham ; but no other particulars are known of this society. It is probable, that it joined the church of which we are treating ; as members of the names of Jemmett and Beacham are frequently mentioned in its records.*

In the year 1717, this church united with several other baptist churches, both particular and general, in rebuilding and enlarging the baptistery at Horslydown, for the general accommodation of their respective societies. The place was registered under the Act of Toleration, and vested in the hands of trustees chosen from the several congregations. This church subscribed its proportion, and elected one trustee.†

Lewis Douglas continued pastor of this church only a few years after its removal into Virginia-street. His conduct soon became awfully inconsistent with his profession : and, after much trouble and disgrace, he was excluded from the communion of the church, Aug. 7, 1720. It appears that, for some time previous to that event, he had forsaken his station, and wandered about the country. After this separation, we have no farther particulars of this unhappy man.‡

The church, being thus left destitute of a pastor, was much indebted to the zeal and discretion of a few leading members, who cheerfully stepped

* W.A.C.B. 1696 and 1702. † Crosby, Vol. IV. p. 189.

‡ Ch. Lane Records, 1730.

forwards to assist their brethren : especially of Mr. Maulden, the son of their former pastor, who was very active and useful. Their first care was, to procure suitable supplies for carrying on the public worship of the congregation. They applied, for assistance, to the general baptist ministers in London ; and, among others, engaged the services of the celebrated Dr. Gale, for one Lord's-day in every month. They also paid a laudable attention to the discipline of the society, during the vacancy in the pastoral office. The members, who appear at this time to have been numerous, were distributed, according to their places of abode, into the various districts of London and Southwark—Wapping—Whitechapel—and East Smithfield. Persons were frequently appointed to visit all the members in each of these districts, and to make a report to the church of their conduct, character, and circumstances.

Yet they still felt their need of a settled pastor, and kept that important object constantly in view. As a necessary preparation, they sought wisdom and direction from the Father of lights ; and united in keeping June 1st. 1720, as a day of solemn fasting and prayer, “to implore the Divine assistance,” and intreat God “to appear for them” in their destitute circumstances : and invited several neighbouring ministers to assist them in the services of the day. They next began to enquire for a proper person to fill the important station : and appear first to have corresponded with a minister of the name of John How ; but as he did not agree with them in the maintaining the laying on of hands, as a foundation principle, this negociation was soon closed.—Their attention was also directed to Mr. Joseph

Morris, of Welton, in Northamptonshire; but he declined their overtures. At length, they applied to Mr. Matthew Randall, who was then joint elder with Mr. R. Drinkwater, over the general baptist church at Chichester. This minister's business calling him frequently to London, he had opportunities of occasionally supplying the congregation in Virginia-street: and his labours were so acceptable, that they wrote to the church at Chichester to permit him to settle with them. That society, considering that it would promote the cause of the Redeemer, and probably render Mr. Randall both more useful and more comfortable, yielded to their request. But his connections in business prevented his immediate removal: and, for more than a year, he supplied them once a month, and administered the Lord's-supper. In the beginning of 1722, he removed to London, and assumed the regular oversight of this church.*

SECT. 2.—The Transactions of the Church now assembling in Church Lane, from the Settlement of Mr. Randall to the Formation of the New Connection.

In a few months after Mr. Randall had settled with the church in Virginia-street, the practice of singing, in public worship, was introduced. This was thought too great an innovation, to be made by the sanction of a common church-meeting: but a general visit to all the members being appointed, the messengers were directed to in-

* Ch. Lane Records, 1720—1723.

quire the opinion of each individual on the subject. There appearing a considerable majority in favour of the proposition, and none who directly opposed it, the church agreed, Mar. 1722, to introduce it, as soon as convenient. Yet they only ventured, at this time, to sing once in each service : it was not till 1729, that they began to sing after sermon.

Towards the close of the year 1722, this society elected four deacons ; Solomon Ware, John Parsons, Samuel Cave, and Isaac Jemmett : and they were ordained to that office, May 21st. following. In the ensuing winter, a lecture was opened on the Lord's-day evening ; in order more effectually to promote the prosperity of the cause.

In 1726, this church co-operated very essentially in the establishment of an institution, the beneficial effects of which are felt by the general baptists of the present day. This was the raising of a Fund, for the support of the baptist cause, by assisting in the maintenance of poor ministers, and in the education of young preachers. The particular baptists had recently formed a similar plan, the benefits of which were confined to their own party. The general baptists, finding themselves thus excluded, determined to attempt to raise a Fund for the same purposes, on more liberal principles. They declared the object of their plan was to relieve all ministers " without distinction, as their exigencies require, who agree in the practice of baptizing by immersion, upon a profession of faith, and appear to be sober, pious, and faithful in the discharge of their work." This fund was proposed to be raised by voluntary contributions, collections, and annual subscriptions ; and to be placed at the disposal of a board of managers chosen annually by the

churches whose yearly collections amounted to five pounds, together with all private annual subscribers of the same sum. No distribution was to take place till the capital amounted to five hundred pounds; and all additions that should afterwards be made to the stock were declared to be inviolable:—no diminution of the capital whatever being permitted.

This excellent institution was warmly patronized by the churches, and a considerable sum was soon raised; to which the church in Virginia-street contributed liberally: and Mr. Thomas Shering, a respectable member of that society, was chosen the first treasurer. This Fund still exists; and distributes annually the sum of two hundred pounds, to the great relief of many poor and young ministers. During the first years of its operation, several particular baptists shared its favours: but, it is believed, that both its maintenance and support have been long confined to the general baptists of the Old and New Connections.*

Though religion was prosperous in this society, yet the members of it observed, with deep concern, the rapid decline of the general baptist cause throughout the kingdom, which was too

* The first proposition for the establishing of this Fund was made to the Paul's-alley church, July 25th. by Messrs. Joseph Burroughs and James Foster, afterwards the celebrated Dr. Foster, who were then joint-pastors of that congregation, and had drawn up the plan, in concert with several ministers and private gentlemen of other churches.—At its formation, it was proposed to educate young men for the ministry; and we transcribe the regulations respecting their admission, as a specimen of the good sense of the projectors. “When any persons shall be recommended to the society, in order to be encouraged as students;—before their admission, inquiry shall be made, by a committee of the managers, with respect to their morals and piety, and as to

visible in the former part of the last century. In 1733, therefore, they proposed “to keep a day of fasting and prayer, in conjunction with the other congregations of the general faith, to bewail the declining state of religion, piety, zeal, and love among them.” On this occasion, a collection was made, towards building a country meeting-house; and a plan was produced for building a meeting-house, every year, in some part of the nation, for the use of the general baptists. So anxious were they for the extension of what they esteemed the cause of truth.

The lease of the meeting-house in Virginia-street expiring, at Lady-day 1741, this church, after several unsuccessful attempts to renew it, were compelled to look out for another situation. They agreed with the sabbatarian society in Mill Yard, for the use of their meeting-house, on the Lord’s-day, at a yearly rent of ten pounds; and assembled, in that place, for the first time, on the last Lord’s-day in May, 1741.

For several succeeding years, this society appears to have been tranquil and united, and the cause of religion prospered. Many respectable persons were members of it, who very generously

their abilities and proficiency in learning: and such only shall be received, as have been baptized by immersion, upon profession of faith, and are members of some baptized church; and in whom it may be reasonably hoped that there is a real love to religion, as well as a good disposition for literature.”—Happy would it be for the christian world, if these rational principles were acted upon by all who superintend the education of ministers.

In 1792, the original mode of appointing managers, through the change of circumstances, becoming inefficient, a meeting of the delegates from the congregations concerned in this institution was held: and it was agreed to place the concerns of the Fund in the hands of fifteen Managers, who should be chosen by the churches, and hold their situations for life.—*Crosby, Vol. IV. p. 201.—Wilson, Vol. III. p. 251.—W.A.C.B. 1726, and P.I.*

assisted the church, by frequent donations to the poor, as well as gifts and legacies to the church. Two worthy benefactors deserve notice. Mrs. Berry, a benevolent lady, to whom, during her life, the poor were much indebted, at her death bequeathed to the church the lease of a house in Pennington-street :—and Mr. Thomas Shering, an opulent and worthy gentleman, who was long actively employed in prosecuting schemes of usefulness, and in serving the congregation and the public, towards the close of his life, endowed the church with an estate in Spitalfields. Both these endowments have long since ceased, in consequence of the expiration of the leases by which they were held.

Mr. Randall continued to labour diligently and acceptably among this people till Aug. 5th. 1756, when death removed him from his station. He was a man of good abilities, and a cultivated mind. During his long labours in the ministry, in which he was employed nearly fifty years, he experienced considerable trials. He appears to have been unhappy in his domestic connections ; and suffered much, during the first years of his residence in London, from the tongue of calumny. But his steady and honourable conduct stopped the mouth of gainsayers ; and procured him, as he advanced in life, increasing respect and friendship.

The church at Chichester, by which he was first called to the ministry, and the excellent Mr. Drinkwater, with whom he was co-pastor for several years, retained the greatest esteem and affection for him : and, on the death of his former colleague, in 1743, invited him from London to preach his funeral sermon. The estimation in which he was held by the elders and churches of

his own denomination, was evinced by the general assembly, which, in 1747, invited him to accept the office of messenger. Mr. Randall published his sermon on the death of Mr. Drinkwater, under the title of "The exalted Hopes of the Righteous, at, and after death, considered:" from Prov. xiv. 32. He was, also, the author of "Reflections on the Duty of Masters, Mistresses, and Servants: in which several Irregularities are reproved, and certain plain and useful Rules proposed, for promoting the Peace and Tranquility of Families." This piece appears to have been well received, and soon came to a second edition.

After the death of Mr. Randall, the church was occasionally supplied by Mr. John Brittain, a member of the general baptist church, under Mr. S. Fry, in Horslydown; who had, for a few years, been employed, under the sanction of that society, as an itinerant preacher about Nine Elms and Battersea. His temper being fearless, and his manner animated, he acquired a considerable degree of popularity; though his mind had received little improvement from literature. His occasional labours were so well approved by the congregation in Mill Yard, that they gave him an invitation to take the oversight of them: to which he consented. He was ordained to the pastoral office, Dec. 16th. 1756, by Messrs. Robert Pyall, Thomas Harrison, Samuel Fry, and Jonathan Brown. At the same time, William Hill was ordained deacon.

The congregation, feeling the inconvenience of assembling in a place which belonged to another church, grew desirous of possessing a meeting-house of their own. In the beginning of 1760, they opened a subscription towards a fund for that purpose. They soon found a commodious

situation, in Church-lane, Whitechapel, which they secured ; and, March 26th. 1761, a committee was appointed, to oversee the building of a new meeting-house. It was not finished, however, till two years afterwards : and the first church-meeting was held in it, Mar. 23rd. 1763.

In 1769, Messrs. Williams, Brown, Willmott, and Preston were chosen deacons ; and ordained, June 17th. by Messrs. Sexton, Brittain, Brown and Hitchman. Two years afterwards, Mr. Brittain was seriously indisposed ; which gave his people an opportunity of shewing their respect and affection for their pastor, by holding a prayer meeting, to implore the Almighty “to spare him for his glory, and the further benefit of his church.”

This society appears, at this time, to have been zealously engaged in promoting the cause of their Saviour ; especially in discovering and cultivating ministerial gifts. For this purpose, two young men were appointed as readers ; whose office it was, to read a portion of the scriptures at the commencement of public worship. A meeting was held every Lord’s-day morning, and one in the evening each week, for the improvement of gifts : and a lecture was maintained on the Lord’s-day evenings, by Mr. Brittain, and several young preachers. These efforts were blessed by the great Head of the church. Several young ministers were raised up, and numbers were added to their fellowship. In June 1770, when the New Connection was formed, this society consisted of about three hundred members, one pastor, seven deacons, and one young minister.*

* Ch. Lane Records. Min. of Ass. N. C. W. A. C. B. Randall’s Sermon, p. 9.

SECT. 3.—*Notices of the Church now assembling in Great Suffolk-street, from the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century to the Formation of the New Connection: with a brief Account of the Churches in Kent and Essex which united in forming that Connection.*

THE other church in London, which united in forming the New Connection, was the society in the Park, Southwark, that now assembles in Great Suffolk-street. It was, as we have already seen, a branch of the general baptist church at Dockhead; and formed a separate interest in 1764. Its first pastor, William Marnor, was succeeded by Mr. William Brown, who was the elder at the close of the seventeenth century.*

Mr. Brown attended the general Assembly, as the elder of this church, in 1704; and, probably, died soon after that date: as we find his successor, Mr. John Tayler, settled with this people in the commencement of 1707. No particulars remain of Mr. Tayler, except that he attended the general Assembly regularly, as the pastor of this congregation, from 1710 to 1715; and was, probably, the author of a piece, entitled, “An Examination of Stokes’ Argument in Favour of Sprinkling.” We are equally unacquainted with the affairs of the church during his ministry.—Feb. 10th. 1714, three neighbouring general baptist societies joined with this church in keeping a day of fasting and prayer at the Park meeting-house.

Mr. Joseph Jenkins, a minister then of some note among the general baptists, succeeded Mr.

* See Vol. I. pp. 264, 265, 335, 336.

Tayler. He was called out as a preacher, in 1693, by the church in White's-alley, of which he was an esteemed member; and laboured among them till 1702, when he settled with the congregation in Hart-street, Covent Garden. In 1709, he removed to the general baptist church at High Hall, which had been under the care of Doctor William Russell, of controversial memory. After labouring in this station for seven years, he accepted an invitation, in 1716, to become the pastor of the society in the Park; and was followed thither by many of his hearers from High Hall. The infirmities of age obliged him to resign the pastoral office, about the year 1731; but he continued a member of this society till his death; the precise period of which is not known. He was living, in 1736, in low outward circumstances. Mr. Jenkins was much esteemed among the churches as a preacher, and frequently employed on public occasions. He published several "Funeral Sermons"—"a Discourse on Brotherly Love"—"The Riches of Divine Grace in the accepting of great Sinners on their return to him;" and revised and re-published Doctor Griffith's "God's Oracles and Christ's Doctrine." During the eldership of Mr. Jenkins, there were two occasional preachers in the Park church, Mr. William Grove and Mr. William Sturch; but no particulars respecting them have come under our notice, except that the latter died in 1728.

In 1731, Mr. George Coventry took the oversight of this church; but was removed before the close of that year. Though this minister appears to have been in narrow circumstances, yet the family was respectable; as they had a large tomb in the burying-ground belonging to the Park meeting-house. Mr. George Mulliner, the

son of Mr. Abraham Mulliner, the worthy pastor of the general baptist church in White's-alley, succeeded Mr. Coventry; and presided over this society till 1740. He was succeeded by a Mr. S. Hands, who had been a minister at Coventry. His stay was short; and was terminated in 1744; but whether by death or removal, is, with respect to him, as well as his two predecessors, uncertain.

Mr. Hands' successor was Mr. John Treacher, from Berkhamstead. This venerable minister was baptized, when only twenty years of age, by Mr. John Russell, pastor of the church at Chesham; and, in less than two years, was called to the ministry. His labours were made very useful, and he was highly esteemed by his friends, whom he continued to serve as preacher till 1745; when he accepted a call to the pastoral office from the church in the Park. Over this society he presided, with great diligence and approbation, till his death, April 12th. 1756, in the seventy-fifth year of his age. His neighbour, Mr. S. Fry, of Fair-street, Horslydown, preached his funeral sermon, from 2 Thes. ii. 16, which he afterwards published. He gives this pleasing account of the character of Mr. J. Treacher. "It was always his care to be an ornament to the religion he professed; and to inculcate it by an inoffensive and exemplary conduct. The more conspicuous virtues of his life, were, his unaffected humility and patience under the difficulties and afflictions of life, demeaning himself with cheerfulness and resignation. His quiet, peaceable, forbearing disposition shone in a most resplendent light, throughout his whole conduct: which, as it in some measure qualified him for it, so it occasioned his being called to the good office of arbi-

tration, both in the church and amongst his other friends and acquaintances : in which difficult task he was generally successful. And as he was of a meek and quiet spirit, so he enjoyed quietness, composure, and serenity of mind, even to his last moments. As a minister of the gospel, he flourished therein : bringing forth acceptable fruit to a good old age. And when confined to his bed nearly four months, and oftentimes attended with acute pain, his discourse of his supports and comforts was very entertaining to those about him. He was blessed with an humble, but firm and unshaken persuasion of the divine approbation, through the mercy of God, and the mediation of Jesus Christ ; often using the words of the text, ‘a good hope through grace’ His affectionate regard for his children, and their offspring, led him frequently to put up ejaculatory petitions for them, particularly that they might highly prize the means of grace, and suitably improve them.”

Mr. Ba. Treacher supplied, for a few months, the place of his worthy father, whose character we have just transcribed ; but soon left this society, to take the oversight of the church in Glasshouse-yard. On his departure, Mr. Alexander Dobson was called to the pastoral office over the Park church ; and continued his connection with it till his death, in 1767. It is probable, that the cause prospered in his hands, as the meeting-house in Duke-street was, during his ministry, rebuilt.

After the death of Mr. Dobson, this congregation was occasionally supplied by Mr. W. Summers, a member and deacon of the society in Church-lane, Whitechapel. He had been called to the ministry in 1760 : and his labours were so approved by the friends at the Park, that they

invited him to be their pastor. With this invitation he complied, and settled amongst them in 1768.

These are all the notices which we have been able to collect, respecting this society, during the period now under review. At the commencement of the New Connection, in 1770, it consisted of one pastor, two deacons, and fifty-three members: and religion appeared to be reviving.*

Though most of the general baptists in Kent adhered to the ancient Assembly, yet the churches at Eythorn, Deal and Bessell's Green united in the formation of the New Connection. The early history of these societies, as far as we have been able to trace it, has been detailed in the former volume: and, as their union with their new friends was only temporary, it would not be necessary, had we the requisite documents, to continue a regular account of their transactions through the succeeding years: we shall, therefore, only glance at the state of each in 1770.

The church at Eythorn, venerable for its antiquity, had been for nearly two centuries under the care of pastors of one family, and all of the name of John Knott.† In 1770, John Knott, who had then the oversight of it, assisted at the formation of the New Connection: and his church, at that period, was composed of one pastor, two deacons, and thirty-three members. There was an appearance of increasing zeal amongst them, and a growing taste for experimental religion; and they were peaceable and affectionate.

* W. A. C. B. Wilson, Vol. IV. pp. 180—184. Min. of Gen. Ass. Min. of Ass. N. C. and Church Lanc Records.

† Vol. I. pp. 281, 282.

The church at Deal was a branch of the church at Dover.* It had sunk low; but appeared to be reviving. At the commencement of the New Connection, it was supplied by Mr. James Fenn, and consisted of only twenty-one members, although there was a great number of hearers.

Mr. John Stanger, the pastor of the ancient general baptist church at Bessell's Green, assisted also at the formation of the New Connection. This church had been founded, during the civil wars, by the apostolic William Jeffery; and had been a numerous and flourishing society, from which many other respectable congregations had derived their origin.† It had, however, shared in the general decline, and was now reduced to forty-five members.

These Kentish congregations were joined, on the same occasion, by several small churches in Essex; probably the remains of more flourishing societies which had formerly existed in that county. We have seen that, in 1646, Mr. S. Oates itinerated in these parts; and baptized numbers on a profession of faith.‡ This, probably, laid the foundation of the general baptist cause in Essex, where we meet with several regular churches of that denomination, during the Protectorate. At the close of the seventeenth century, also, we have traces of respectable and zealous societies of the "general faith," in the same parts.§ It is highly probable that they partook of the declension which, towards the middle of the last century, depressed the whole denomination: but, as we have not been able to obtain any regular account of their proceedings, we can

* Vol. I. p. 278. † Vol. I. pp. 108, 280, 361.

‡ Vol. I. pp. 116, 117. § Ibid p. 356, Note.

only record their own report of their state, in 1770.

The church at Halsted, under the pastoral care of Mr. David Wilkin, consisted, at that time, of forty-three members. Their public worship was well attended, and religion appeared to be reviving. Mr. Charles Parman laboured amongst a small society at Castle-Headingham, which then comprised only twenty members; and at Coggeshall, Mr. Robert French served a church of no more than eighteen members. It is almost needless to add that, in both these places, they complain of religion being in a low state. The societies at Braintree and Sudbury also united with the former on this occasion; though they did not send any representatives to the first association: the first consisted of twenty five members, under a minister whose name is not recorded; and the latter was composed of only twelve members, and had neither minister nor deacon.*

SECT. 4.—A concise View of the Affairs of the Lincolnshire General Baptists, from the Close of the Seventeenth Century to the Formation of the New Connection.

BEFORE we attempt to trace the history of those churches in Lincolnshire which united in forming the New Connection, it may be both useful and interesting to take a rapid glance at the proceedings of the whole body of general baptists, in that part of the kingdom, from the close of our former volume to the commencement of that union.

* Min. of Ass. of New Con. 1770.

When Mr. Hooke returned from the general assembly, in 1704, with the “Unity of the Churches,”* he was very desirous that the congregations under his superintendance should agree to the principles and regulations which it contained. Having been a party in negotiating and concluding that treaty of peace, he availed himself of the authority which his office gave him, to urge its adoption with so much vigour as to disgust many of his brethren. The church at Boston preferred a formal charge against him, at the association, for “maintaining an arbitrary power in the ministry, distinct from the church;” and many others blamed him for making articles of faith, drawn up by fallible men, of equal consequence with the oracles of truth. The dissatisfaction against him was much increased, in the following year, when he assisted in composing the strange “Expedient,” which forbade persons signing “the Unity of the Churches” to ask any questions respecting its meaning.† The discontent then arose to such a height, in Spalding church, as to cause a division.

Mr. Hooke, finding that the majority of his brethren disapproved of his conduct, declined attending at the Lincoln association. When that assembly met, Mar. 27th. 1707, it resolved “that the paper called ‘the Unity of the Churches,’ and the Expedient thereunto affixed, ought not to be received by any member of their churches;” and being informed that several brethren had rejected their elders for opposing that paper, the association decreed “that such conduct was highly to blame, and a great breach of gospel order.” The next year, Messrs. Benjamin Grantham, J.

* Vol. I. p. 46.

† Vol. I. p. 477.

Marham, and J. Pollard, who seem to have been the leaders of the opposition, were required to bring forward their charges against Mr. Hooke and his friends, that they might be tried at the next association. But, as the persons accused refused to attend at that meeting, these matters were probably never brought to a hearing.

The association, apprehending that their opposition to the domineering spirit of Mr. Hooke, as they esteemed it, might be misrepresented as a disapprobation of his doctrinal sentiments, thought it prudent to declare, at the same meeting, "that they remained upon their ancient gospel faith and principles; owned by their ancient brethren, and professed by themselves for many years past." But this declaration not having the desired effect, they found it necessary, two years afterwards, to publish a more explicit avowal of their sentiments, on those important points which then convulsed the whole body.*

The congregations who adhered to the association, having no one in the messenger's office amongst them, considered their organization as incomplete. In March, 1707, they chose Mr. T. Ulliyott, elder of the church at Elsham, to that dignity; and directed that his ordination should

* The following was circulated on this occasion.—"We, the Elders and Brethren associated at Lincoln, May 9th, 1709—being informed, by several worthy brethren, that many, dissenting from our Association, have and do, with great industry, spread abroad, that we deny the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, &c.

"This, therefore, is to satisfy all our christian brethren, that we do now, as we ever did, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, in both his natures—Solemnly declaring that we believe him to be truly God, of the same nature or substance as the Father; and that he is as truly man, of the same nature or substance as his mother: and so he is God-man, manifested in the flesh;

take place in the next month. This being prevented by the dissensions which then distracted the churches, they renewed their election, in 1708; and he was ordained August 8th. As they could procure no messenger to assist at this solemnity, the association authorized six elders to undertake it.

For several succeeding years, the disputes between Mr. Hooke's friends and the association raged with increasing bitterness; and the latter appears to have connected itself more closely with the general assembly. The friends of peace, dreading the mischievous effects of these unhappy contests, made several ineffectual efforts to procure a reconciliation. At length, on March 4th. 1712, a meeting was effected, and mutual explanations were made. Mr. Hooke disclaimed all opinions contrary to the independency of the churches; acknowledged the authority of the scriptures, in opposition to articles of human composition; and expressed his sorrow for having been concerned in supporting the "Expedient" affixed to the Unity of the Churches; which he formally abjured, and promised to use his influence to procure its revocation from the general assembly. But, in the midst of these concessions,

and as such we own him, in the union of both his natures, to be our blessed Saviour and Redeemer.

"Furthermore, it being reported, that there are some of our community that suppose that the Almighty God is in the shape or form of a man—this may satisfy all such, and other persons whatever, that we know of none such persons amongst us, and that we absolutely abhor such an opinion; firmly believing that God is a spirit, infinite and incomprehensible."

Signed, by *Thomas Ulliyott* and twenty two others.—As several alterations were made before the publication, we have corrected the printed copy by the minutes of the association, in which the original document is preserved.

he could not refrain from making some severe reflections on the conduct of his opponents ; and, especially, of the church at Boston. Yet, as his accusers had neglected to attend this conference, though regularly summoned, Mr. Hooke was declared “to stand clear in the messenger’s office, as formerly.” Mr. Ullyott also, having cleared himself from suspicion of heresy, by assenting to the Confession of Faith, was confirmed in the same rank. This treaty of peace was signed by thirty-two ministers and brethren ; and sanguine hopes of a lasting union and tranquility were entertained. But all these hopes quickly vanished. At the next association, August 5th. of the same year, the friends at Boston appealed against some assertions of Mr. Hooke, in the preceding meeting ; and the association shewing a disposition to admit their appeal, Mr. Hooke and his party left the assembly abruptly, and protested against its proceedings. Those that remained, being discouraged and perplexed by this defection, and seeing no prospect of advantage from future meetings, as long as the minds of all parties continued in such a state of irritation, suspended the association till the churches should see occasion to resume it.

The animosity of both parties, being thus increased, continued, for several years, to distract the churches, and obstruct the progress of the gospel ; and no associations were held. The natural effects followed, in the decline of the prosperity and numbers of the various societies, and the decay of vital godliness in individuals. All real christians became sensible of the necessity of laying aside controversy, and uniting in the support of the common cause ; and a meeting of the leaders of both parties was held, July 20th.

1718, at which such mutual apologies and concessions were made, as laid the foundation for future union and co-operation. They agreed—“that they were of one faith, as it is contained in the scriptures—that this faith ought to be maintained and defended—that they could not suffer this faith to be opposed or contradicted—and that the scriptures are the only foundations of a true faith ; but that such Confessions of Faith as are agreeable to them ought not to be contradicted, nor yet imposed as terms of communion.” Considering also the misunderstandings that had been occasioned during these controversies, they “besought all the brethren to take satisfaction in their cordial and christian agreement ; and to labour to repair the reputations of those who had, in any way, suffered in their characters.” This meeting, likewise, agreed to resume their former associations ; and appointed the first to be held at Lincoln, October 14th, following, “for the further establishment of the churches in truth and peace.” This association accordingly met ; and it appears to have been a season of unanimity and love. Among other important agreements, we find this pleasing article. “We agree to keep a day of fasting and prayer, in all our churches, to humble ourselves before almighty God, for the great offences that have been committed, in the time of the unhappy divisions that have been among us ; and to give thanks to him that an end hath been put to these divisions : and also to pray that God would bless the peace that is gained in these our churches, and raise up a succession of faithful ministers, that vacant places may be supplied ; and that he would bless our nation.” This day was fixed for

November 19th, 1718 ; which was observed in all the congregations with great solemnity.*

These contentions had produced the most deplorable effects ; and the first care of the Lincolnshire association was to endeavour to repair the injury which the cause had received. It was earnestly recommended that Mr. Hooke should devote himself more unreservedly to the visiting of the churches, and the other parts of the messenger's office : and the church at Bourn, of which he was pastor, was importuned to set him more at liberty to travel. It is likely, that he was then the only messenger in those parts ; as we hear nothing of Mr. Ulliyott, after the year 1721. A considerable degree of laxity in discipline, and conformity to the manners of the world, had, during these times of confusion, crept into the different societies. The association, therefore, found it necessary, for many succeeding years, to bear a decided testimony against vain apparel, mixed marriages, games of chance, and other practices which they deemed inconsistent with the simplicity and gravity of the christian character.

The jealousy with which they had watched

* The persons included in this pacification, as the representatives of their respective societies, were Joseph Hooke, of Bourn, Benjamin Sharp, John Hill, and Samuel Ellis, of Lincoln ; Joseph Anderton, of Witherton ; J. Grant, J. Woodward, J. Anderson, and T. Giliott, of the Isle of Axholme ; T. Ulliyott, of Elsham ; J. Crawstone, of the North Marsh ; Edward Wood, Edward Makins, Joseph Dent, and J. Hursthous, of the South Marsh ; William Roberts, of Gosberton ; N. Locking, R. Barker, R. Lewis, and R. Anderson, of Asterby ; Humphry Fletcher, of Sleaford ; Thomas Ellis, J. Booth, and J. Hardy, of Broughton ; and Edward Hardy of Spalding. To these must be added, Leonard Isaac, of Tattershall, William Veall, William Wray, and Joseph Bickton who, though not at the association, attended at the previous meetings.

each other, while at variance, had induced several ministers, under pretence of greater accuracy, to read their sermons. This was so directly opposed to the practice of their most eminent preachers, in the most flourishing times of the general baptist cause, that the association hastened to prevent the evils with which they thought it fraught; and, in 1722, adopted the following strong resolution. “Taking into consideration the corruption that is like to ensue in the church, by the liberty that some take in reading sermons, under the notion of having them more correct; and falsely call it preaching; we bear our public testimony against, and utterly disallow it: as it tends to the destruction of spiritual gifts, and is like to introduce a mere formality in religion; hinders the edification of souls, and greatly discourages honest and faithful men in the exercise and improvement of their gifts; and wounds the consciences of many sincere persons. We desire, therefore, that such a dangerous practice may be discountenanced in all our churches.*

Nor did the members of this association content themselves with mere negative admonitions, but earnestly urged the adoption of every measure that was judged likely to revive the sinking interest. With this view, they exhorted all the churches to encourage meetings for prayer and religious conversation: and strongly insisted on the duty and advantage of a regular system of catechizing children and servants, and of a constant attention to their instruction in the great truths of christianity. To aid in this necessary work, several catechisms were, about this time, published by some of their leading ministers.

* C. A. B. 1722.

But the object which appeared to them the most important, and which they recommended with the greatest importunity, was the discovery and cultivation of ministerial gifts and graces. To accomplish this great end, they not only used every prudent and scriptural method ; but, for a long series of years, observed annually a day of fasting and prayer, to intreat the great Lord of the harvest to send more labourers into his vine-yard.

These zealous endeavours of the ministers appear to have been but feebly seconded by the body at large, and, therefore, to have produced very little effect. Among the worthy christians, who mourned over the decline of the cause of truth, was Mr. John Hursthorne, the pastor of the society at Monksthorpe and Burgh. He had been repeatedly chosen to the messenger's office ; but was prevented from accepting it, by the refusal of his church to give him up. In 1729, he printed "An Epistle to the baptized Churches in Lincolnshire," in which he draws an affecting parallel between their former state of prosperity and the low circumstances into which they had then sunk. "When I consider," he says, "your former unity, and the sweet harmony which was then among you, how constantly and zealously you associated, in those times, in great numbers, to promote the cause and interest of Jesus Christ, the thoughts do sometimes rejoice my soul : but now, alas ! I am as much grieved to behold the reverse !" "It is Satan's old maxim, 'Divide and destroy :' and, in our late contentions, we have lost many of our best men ; had little but party interest carried on ; our unity quite broken ; and anarchy and disorder let in like a flood. We offended our good God, grieved one another's

hearts, stumbled inquiring souls, have hindered Christ's cause, and procured to ourselves a dear and deep repentance." "God has shewn his displeasure against our sinful quarrels, in the many awful strokes of his providence, by which he has removed from us, in so few years, so many of our best and ablest ministers; and by raising up so few to supply their places." "Besides how little we enjoy now of the presence of God, compared with what we have experienced in times past!—What sweet fellowship had we together before our divisions! Our fellowship was then with the Father, and Jesus Christ our Lord. How amiable has his tabernacle been, how delightful our christian society, because the Lord was with us. But, brethren, when did you feel and perceive his presence? Surely not as in times past. How glad were you, in those times, to assemble together! How much rejoiced in the enjoyment! and how unwilling to part! But now, alas! no strangling, no desire, no pains taken. Surely the Lord is not with us as formerly!"—"Again. The sad decay and the declining state of the baptized churches in Lincolnshire is another proof of the divine displeasure. How many once flourishing congregations are become thin; and some have scarce any monument of a church left behind! I know but of very few out of many, that remain in their ancient flourishing state. How many of our lights are extinguished, and the candlesticks removed out of their places! And that which is yet worse, how unconcerned do we appear to be! What little notice do we take of it! How insensible of the danger and ruin which threaten us! Does it not look as though the Lord had left us to chuse our own delusions, and to reap the fruits of our own devices?"

The accuracy of this discouraging account of the low state of the general baptist cause in Lincolnshire, at this time, is fully confirmed by the minutes of their associations : and, what is more to be lamented, this decline continued till long after the conclusion of this period. Their subsequent history, indeed, consists chiefly of a series of well-meant, but unsuccessful efforts, made by a few friends of the souls of men, to rouse the attention of their cotemporaries to a sense of their danger, and to arrest the total decay of their congregations.

At the time when the pamphlet from which we have made the above extracts was published, Mr. Hooke was advanced in years, and oppressed with infirmities ; yet he still continued his labours to promote the prosperity of the churches. He added a Postscript to Mr. Hursthous'e's Epistle, pressing the brethren to activity, union, and order : and, notwithstanding his age, persevered in visiting the various parts of his diocese. October 5th. 1736, he presided at an association at Lincoln : and, it is probable, that he was unable to return to his friends ; as he died, in that city, on the 23rd of the following month. He had been, for sixty years, an honourable member of the baptized churches ; forty-nine of which he had been the pastor of the general baptist church at Bourn and Hackenby ; and, during forty years, had sustained the office of messenger. We have no account of his birth ; but he could not, at the time of his decease, have been much less than eighty years of age. Through the long course of his service in the church, Mr. Hooke appears to have been actuated by a sincere desire to promote the honour of his Saviour, and the salvation of sinners. His labours were abundant : and, con-

sidering the advantages which he had enjoyed, his abilities and acquirements were very respectable. The unhappy times in which he was called to act, discovered, indeed, on several occasions, that he was a man of like passions with his brethren : yet he evidently was, on the whole, a worthy man, a pious christian, and a faithful and successful minister :—one of the principal ornaments and supports of the general baptist cause in Lincolnshire.

The association had, for some time before Mr. Hooke's death, been looking out for a proper person to assist him in his arduous duties ; and, having been disappointed of obtaining Mr. Hursthouse, they applied to Mr. William Johnson, who was, probably, pastor of a church in the Isle of Ely. October 30th, 1731, he was solemnly ordained, by Mr. Hooke, “to serve the churches in Lincolnshire, in conjunction with those in the Isle of Ely, in the office of messenger.” After the decease of his venerable colleague, the whole care of the churches devolved on Mr. Johnson, who was laudably diligent in the oversight of them. He was punctual in attending meetings, and annually visited most of the societies under his superintendence. But his vigilant attention to the concerns of religion injured his temporal circumstances, which, in 1744, became deeply embarrassed. The churches contributed towards extricating him from his difficulties ; but he found it necessary, in 1745, to remove to Coventry. He visited Lincolnshire occasionally after this removal, and presided, as senior messenger, at the association in 1749. He appears to have preserved the esteem of his friends, notwithstanding his misfortunes ; as he was employed, in 1743, in the ordination of Mr. G. Boyce, and styled “our

beloved brother Johnson." He died at Coventry, in the eighty-eighth year of his age.

When Mr. Johnson removed to Coventry, it was judged proper to provide another to fill his place. A committee was, therefore, appointed by the association, to fix on proper persons: and Messrs. W. Penney, of Lincoln, James Grant, of Asterby, and John Goode, of Boston, were nominated as candidates. Mr. Penney declined the honour; and Mr. Grant, probably, died soon after, as we hear no more of him: Mr. J. Goode, therefore, was ordained messenger, May 9, 1744, by Mr. Johnson. It was also proposed that Mr. Halford, pastor of the churches at Bourn and Coningsby, should be raised to the same rank; but, for some reason unassigned, this design did not take effect.

Mr. Goode appears to have attended to the duties of his station with assiduity and zeal; but few of the ministers were inspired with the same spirit. The associations were very thinly attended: and it was in vain that those who did attend sent letters and ex postulations to the ministers and churches that absented themselves. The union of heart and interest which had so firmly cemented them in former times, was, alas! no more: each looked on his own things. The methodists, too, who now began to be active and zealous, drew away many of their members: and, though the association, in 1745, declared "their faith and practice to be contrary to the holy scriptures, and to the peace and welfare of their societies," and denounced the discipline of the church against such as attended their meetings; yet the warmth and affection which animated the new professors triumphed, in many instances, over the decrees and threatenings of this feeble

synod. To strengthen their hands, they renewed their ancient connection with the general assembly in London, which had been interrupted for nearly forty years ; and, in 1750, sent Mr. Goode to that meeting, as the representative of the baptized churches in Lincolnshire. This re-union was, probably, hastened by a friendly epistle the assembly had previously addressed to these churches ; inviting them to a co-operation, and exhorting them to be careful in encouraging and cultivating the gifts of young men who promised to be useful in the ministry : informing them, at the same time, of the general baptist fund for the education and support of ministers. This letter was dated December 7th, 1748, and signed Joseph Morris and J. Neele.

But the general baptist interest, in these parts, sustained a great loss, soon afterwards, by the unexpected removal of Mr. Goode. On Lord's-day, December 1st. 1751, he preached twice, with his usual animation, and administered the Lord's-supper. At ten in the evening, he retired to rest, apparently in good health : and at eight, the next morning, was found lying on the floor of his apartment, speechless, senseless, and incapable of moving. In this state, he lingered till midnight, when he gasped and expired. "He was," says a cotemporary writer, "an active, shining man, and zealous to promote his master's cause."— Being thus deprived of their worthy messenger, the association elected Gilbert Boyce, pastor of the churches at Coningsby and Asterby, to that office : and he was ordained, Sept. 3rd. 1753, by Mr. W. Johnson.

Though Mr. Boyce was active and earnest in his exertions to revive the declining state of the congregations under his superintendence, the

success was, by no means, proportioned to his efforts. The accession of Messrs. W. Thompson and D. Taylor, gave a transient impulse to the zeal of these professors; but it soon subsided. One minister after another dropped into the grave; and few were raised up to supply the vacant places. The congregations, of course, dwindled away; and, in many instances, the churches became extinct. In 1766, the meeting-house in Lincoln, which, for more than seventy years, had been a kind of metropolitan for the baptized churches of the general faith, in Lincolnshire, where they held their associations, was lent to the particular baptists; on condition of keeping it in repair, and permitting the general baptists to preach in it when they could find opportunity.

The doctrinal opinions of these churches, during this period, appear to have been very unsettled. The philosophising spirit which had unhappily seized this denomination of christians, at the commencement of the century, continued to operate, and produced a laxity of principle and depression of sentiment, that had a very baneful effect. A little before the formation of the New Connection, two unsuccessful attempts were made to fix on some standard of faith: one, by proposing the adoption of a Confession, published in 1724, which agrees with the Confession of 1660: and the other, by appointing Mr. Boyce "to draw up a number of articles of the christian faith, as near as he could to the judgment of these churches." The good man complied, and submitted his creed to the association; but it was rejected, "because it was mostly expressed in scriptural terms."

These ministers were much more united and

consistent in their views of the importance of a conversation becoming the gospel, in those who professed to be the followers of Christ : though it must be confessed that their frequent " testimonies" in favour of it, may raise a suspicion that it was not so generally maintained as it ought to have been. Throughout nearly the whole of this period, they inserted in the minutes of each association a number of resolutions, adapted to discourage vain amusements and sinful compliances with the customs and fashions of the world, and to encourage propriety of character and conduct: and each minister was enjoined " to make it his business to explain and reason upon each article to his people for their further use and profit."— They retained, also, in a good degree, the strictness of their ancient discipline respecting the calling out of ministers. They " allowed no person to preach in any of their congregations, who was not well known or recommended: and no young preacher was permitted to preach in another congregation, before he was approved by the elder and church to which he belonged." And it was made a condition of the loan of the Lincoln meeting house, " that none should be allowed to preach therein, but such as were baptized believers, and had been regularly called to the work of the ministry."

Such appears to have been the progress of the general baptist interest in Lincolnshire, previous to the formation of the New Connection. That event caused a considerable sensation in these churches, especially at the association in 1770, when those members who afterwards united in forming the New Connection, announced their intention of withdrawing. In the following year, the churches that adhered to the Lincolnshire

association were only seven : the church at Coningsby, consisting of eighty or ninety members ; at Fleet, of forty or fifty ;* at Gosberton, of twenty-six ; at Knipton, of eighteen ; at Monks-thorp, of one hundred ; and at Tetney, of twenty-six : and that association was attended by only four elders, and three unordained ministers.†

SECT. 5.—The History of the Churches at Spalding, Fleet, and Boston, from the Close of the Seventeenth Century to the Commencement of the New Connection.

Having thus given a concise account of the proceedings of the whole body of general baptists in Lincolnshire, it will be proper to look back and trace, as distinctly as we are able, the transactions of the churches at Fleet and Boston, which assisted, by their representatives, at the formation of the New Connection. But, as the congregation at Fleet was, for a long time, only a branch of the church at Spalding, it will be necessary to introduce the history of that society, during this period : and, as Spalding ultimately joined the New Connection, this digression will not be foreign to our design.

The rise of the general baptist cause at Spalding, and its introduction to the vicinity of Fleet, have been already recorded.‡ That interest, at

* Fleet church joined the New Connection in 1770 ; but the following year re-united itself to the Lincolnshire Association : and it was not till several years afterwards that it finally left that assembly.

† Hursthouse's Epistle, passim. Minutes of the Lincolnshire Association from 1700 to 1770—B. M. S. S.

‡ Vol. I. pp. 106, 214—218, 317, 318.

the commencement of the eighteenth century, comprised the congregations at Spalding, Gosberton, and Fleet. This large society was then under the pastoral care of Mr. William Roberts, who was ordained in 1699. His usual residence was at Gosberton; and, therefore, when several elders were chosen to assist him at the other places, he was styled, in the Minutes of the association, "the elder of Gosberton." At that period, Mr. Robert Velle, an assistant preacher, laboured at Fleet, with so much regularity, as to be styled their minister: and several other "brethren confirmed in the ministry" were equally active in their respective stations.

But Mr. Roberts did not continue long the sole elder. In 1703, Mr. Joseph Pickerton, and, in 1708, Mr. John Hursthous, both of Spalding, were raised to the same dignity. Soon afterwards, Mr. Edward Hardy, who had been for some time an approved preacher, was also advanced to the pastoral office. Thus it appears, that, in 1710, there were four elders in this church, besides a number of acceptable ministers:—a strong evidence of the flourishing state of religion.

This encouraging prospect, however, soon began to be clouded. In February, 1715, Mr. John Hursthous, one of their highly valuable elders, died. His funeral sermon was preached, by his colleague, Mr. W. Roberts, from Isa. lvii. 2: and his death was a severe loss to the cause. His family was honourable. He and his wife were baptized together, Aug. 11th. 1687, when they had two sons and two daughters. They entered into the spirit of the gospel; and trained up their children in the way in which they ought to walk, and had the satisfaction to find, that, when

they were old, they did not depart from it. In 1690, their two daughters devoted themselves, at the same time, to the Lord by baptism; the one being eighteen years of age, and the other fourteen: and, in 1697, their two sons united to follow their example: the one in the twenty-second and the other in the fifteenth year of his age. Nor did these young professors decline from their course, but persevered to the close of their lives: the daughters becoming mothers in Israel; and the sons eminent ministers of the gospel and worthy pastors of churches.—Their father, being in affluent circumstances and zealous in the cause of his Redeemer, was very helpful in the pecuniary concern of the church. Towards the erection of the first meeting-house at Spalding, which cost only eighty-three pounds, he generously subscribed twenty pounds: and, at his decease, he bequeathed the like sum as a legacy to the congregation. Little did the good man suppose, that it would soon be required for the same object as his former donation.

In a few months after his death, April 1st. 1715, a destructive fire broke out in Spalding, and consumed the meeting house and almost all the other buildings in that part of the town in which it stood. A new one was immediately built, at an expence of one hundred and forty pounds; which was raised in about two years, by the exertions of their own friends, and the aid of sister churches. But, it seems, the projectors paid more attention to accommodation than to elegance. The interior had an unfinished appearance: the pulpit was clumsy; the pews, few; and the floor, brick. It continued, however, unaltered for seventy years.

About this period, there were several approved

ministers labouring for this society, of whom it may be proper to take some notice.—W. Baron was, it may be concluded, possessed of popular talents, as he was appointed by the church, in 1716, to preach a sermon on Discipline. Nothing further respecting him has been preserved; except that his widow died in 1750.—Isaac Hinman was both a preacher and deacon; and, for some years, his labours were frequent and acceptable. But his doctrinal views, on some important points, were different from those of his friends; and caused considerable altercation. In 1708, reports being spread, that Mr. J. Hursthouse and he entertained heretical opinions, they wrote letters to the association, justifying themselves from the charges: and that assembly, “having considered their letters, believed them to be sound in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, both with respect to his divinity and humanity;” and ordered copies of their letters to be sent to all the congregations. Ten years after this, the same charges were revived against Mr. Hinman; and a general meeting of the three branches of the church was convened, when he was excluded from their communion.* In 1722, in consequence

* The minutes of these meetings, being decisive as to the tenets of these professors, at this time, deserve to be recorded.

“*Spalding, June 10th. 1719.*

“At a solemn meeting of all the congregations, viz Spalding, Gosberton, and Fleet, brother Isaac Hinman appeared amongst us; and upon a full and fair hearing, we find him to deny the equality of the Son of God to the Father, as to his divine nature; and, that he had no being, but in purpose and promise, till his incarnation: and in his highest capacity is inferior to the Father, or words to the same purpose; which he refused to retract as error:—So we, the Brethren whose names are under written, agreed, that he is not of our faith, which has been the faith of our churches, before our time; and, whilst he remains in his present mind, we cannot allow him to be a preacher

of some alteration in his sentiments, and to preserve the peace of the society in which he had some partizans, he was restored to fellowship; but there is no evidence of his being afterwards permitted to preach. He died in 1734.—Goss Torrington and John Bullimer began to preach, at Fleet, in 1716; but were soon called from their labours: the latter dying in 1720, and the former surviving him only three years.—W. Blades, a poor but worthy christian, was also acceptably engaged in the sacred work. He was baptized in

amongst us, nor admit him to communion with us: but pity and pray for him, and leave him to his own thoughts and the mercy of God."

Signed,

WILLIAM ROBERTS,
JOHN PICKERTON,
EDWARD HARDY.
MATTHEW HURSTHOUSE,

} And twenty-two more, in behalf
of the rest.

"*Spalding, May 28th 1722.*

"At a meeting, held to revise brother Hinman's case which was heard in this place, June 10th. 1719:—We find he retracts that saying, that Christ had no being but in purpose and promise, before his incarnation. This he disallows now, and condemns as error. And withal owns the equality of the Son with the Father in certain essential properties; as far, he says, as the holy scriptures speak of it.—excepting only self-existence and prime casuality, of which he apprehends the scriptures not to speak: which seem to divers of us cloudy expressions, and to interfere with the sound faith of the Trinity, which has been the faith of this church, and of our churches generally.—Nevertheless, in order that peace and unity may be kept and observed, our beloved brother Hinman doth promise not to oppose to the disturbance of the peace of the church, that faith we have constantly maintained; but to walk in love with his brethren and we desire that all old things should be buried that have been matter of contention as though they had not been."

*Signed "JOSEPH HOOKE, for
peace sake, though a para-
graph is omitted which I
supposed to be in."*

EDWARD HARDY,
JOHN PICKERTON,
WILLIAM ROBERTS.
JOHN HURSTHOUSE,

And thirty-one more, in behalf of the rest.

1624 ; and we find him, in 1702, employed in the humble situation of sexton to the congregation. After losing sight of him for several years, we meet him again, in 1716, acting in the office of deacon, though still in narrow circumstances. In less than two years, he was classed among "the brethren confirmed in the ministry :" and, from the frequency of his engagements, it is probable that his labours were acceptable. He died in 1722.

Mr. Matthew Hursthause the eldest son of their deceased pastor, Mr. John Hursthause, was called to the eldership, in 1718 : his labours however were terminated by death, in 1720. And in 1724, this society was deprived of two other of its elders. John Pickerton died towards the close of the year, at an advanced age; and of Mr. William Roberts we have no later information than May 25th, when he attended the Lincolnshire Association. His abilities as a preacher must have stood high in the estimation of his brethren ; as he was selected to officiate on several public occasions: particularly, in 1708, when Mr. Ulyott being called to the office of messenger, he was appointed, by the Association, to preach the sermon at the ordination.

Mr. Edward Hardy was for several years the only elder over this extended society ; when most of the brethren who occasionally assisted in the work of the ministry had been removed by death. Mr. Hardy survived till 1731, as he had been a member of the church thirty-seven years, and had a family of three children, when he joined it, he must then have attained a good old age. There is reason to believe that his outward circumstances were low ; but he maintained his reputation among his brethren in the

ministry to the last ; and, in the minutes of the Association in 1730, his name is subscribed next to the messenger's.

During the latter years of his life, Mr. Hardy had been assisted in the ministry by Mr. Thomas Blades, probably a kinsman of William Blades already mentioned. Mr. T. Blades was styled "a brother confirmed in the ministry," in 1721 ; and frequently supplied the congregation at Fleet. In 1734, he was elected to the pastoral office ; and for sixteen years seems to have had the whole oversight of the church till his death.*

His son William Blades who had begun to preach long before the death of his father, was on that event, nominated to the eldership, though it does not appear that he ever attained to it. He was however regularly employed as a preacher, and appears to have been well approved.

The congregation at Spalding, which had been considered as the principal seat of this interest, had now considerably declined : and, from the death of Mr. Thomas Blades, was destitute of a pastor, till long after the close of the period now under review. The few members that remained were supplied by the occasional labours of neighbouring ministers. For some time, Mr. J. Halford,† of Bourn, visited them at intervals, and administered the ordinances ; and, after his decease, Mr. Joseph Anderson,‡ pastor of the

* In 1750, he was appointed to preach at the next Association ; but, on signing his name to the minutes, excepted against the appointment. Death preserved him from this service, by removing him to his reward, Oct. 26th. 1750.

† This good man, after labouring upwards of forty years in the ministry, lost his life, about 1759, by the mistake of his apothecary, who administered too large a quantity of opium, during a fit of the gout.

‡ Mr. Joseph Anderson was a very respectable minister ; who

church at Gosberton, took this declining cause under his temporary inspection. Mr. G. Boyce, also, in the discharge of the messenger's office, sometimes travelled to Spalding, and favoured them with his advice and assistance. But such interrupted labours could not be expected to revive a drooping interest: and, at the time of the formation of the New Connection, this church seems to have been almost extinct. We, therefore, now turn our attention to that branch of this ancient society which assembled at Fleet.

After Mr. Vellem's decease, in 1711, it does not appear that any of the numerous preachers, with which the church at Spalding then abounded, took the interest at Fleet so much under his care, as to be esteemed its minister. Many of them laboured occasionally there; but Mr. Roberts, of Gosberton, was the most frequent visitor. The cause was thus supported and extended. In 1723, so many had joined from them at Lutton, a neighbouring village, that the public worship was held, and the Lord's supper administered, alternately at that place and Fleet; till 1729, when the meetings at Lutton were discontinued.

In 1740, Mr. T. Blades, the elder at Spalding, held a church-meeting at Fleet; when a list was made of the members there, which contained thirty-six names: and, in the following year, five more were added; raising the number to forty-one. Of these, seven dwelt at Fleet, twenty-one at Gedney, eight at Holbeach, and three

was ordained to the pastoral office over the church at Gosberton, in 1763. It was remarkable, that this minister who was appointed to preach the Association sermon in 1781, and Mr. B. Thornally who was nominated for the same service, in case of his failure, both died before that meeting; the former, August 1st. 1781, and the latter, November 13th. 1780.

at Lutton. The majority of the members living thus at Gedney, public worship was removed to that place, in the middle of the same year. They met in a large room, belonging to a house occupied by Mr. John Bullimer, one of their deacons.

During the remainder of the life of Mr. T. Blades, he visited Fleet monthly, to preach and administer the ordinances. His son, William Blades, preached for them every fortnight; and continued to supply them, in this manner, for several years after the death of his worthy father. But this dependence on the visits of strangers being precarious, and disappointments from various causes frequently occurring, the church was led to seek for more regular assistance.

Mr. William Kidd, in 1744, removing his habitation from the neighbourhood of Coningsby to Fleet, was honourably dismissed from the church at the former place to the latter. Such was his regular conduct, that, in 1751, he was advanced to the deacon's office; and, induced by the necessities of the congregation, attempted to lead public worship, and expound the scriptures. These attempts being well received, he was encouraged to proceed; and his gifts gradually improving, he grew daily more acceptable. In 1762, the church unanimously invited him to accept the oversight of that branch of the interest; and he became the first pastor that was ordained over the church at Fleet, as a distinct society. When he began to preach, the society consisted of thirty-one members; but before he assumed the eldership, seventeen had been added to their number; though, by reason of deaths and removals, the whole society then amounted to thirty-six only. During the course of his mi-

nistry, the increase was proportionable : and, at his decease, he left fifty persons in communion.

Soon after he assumed the pastoral office, the increase of hearers, joined to some other circumstances, rendered it inconvenient to conduct public worship in the room at Gedney ; and the society determined to build a meeting-house, at Fleet. Having procured a suitable piece of ground, they exerted themselves, and erected a plain edifice ; which was opened for public worship, Sept 2d. 1764. Though the general baptists had maintained their cause in this neighbourhood for eighty-two years, this was the first meeting-house which they had enjoyed. Mr. Kidd continued his pastoral and ministerial duties with increasing usefulness ; and was made the happy instrument of much good to the cause of religion. But his race was quickly run :—he was called to his reward, in Oct. 1768. His character was truly amiable ; and his memory is still cherished, with tender veneration, by those few of his friends whom death has yet spared.

Some time before Mr. Kidd's lamented decease, Mr. Henry Poole, who had been a preacher among the methodists, joined the church at Fleet. After Mr. Kidd's death, he laboured amongst them for about three years ; and, in 1770, attended the meeting when the New Connection was formed. At that time, Fleet church consisted of an unordained minister, two deacons, and fifty members : their public opportunities were well attended ; and religion appeared reviving.*

It only remains, that we close this chapter with

* Lincolnshire Asso. Min. B. M. S. S. from Spalding and Fleet church Books. Min. of Asso. of N. C. &c.

a succinct account of the proceedings of the general baptist church at Boston, Lincolnshire, from the conclusion of the former volume to the formation of the New Connection.

We have already seen, that a society of professors of this denomination existed, in this town, so early as 1653 ; to which the celebrated Thomas Grantham united himself, when he commenced his religious course : and that, at the close of the seventeenth century, it was destitute of a pastor, and in a low state.* For some time afterwards, Mr. Roberts, of Gosberton supplied it frequently ; and, to a certain extent, exercised the pastoral office in it ; so as to be styled, by the members of this church, “our elder.” But, as he continued his connection with the church at Gosberton, his superintendance was irregular, and his labours interrupted ; and the cause of the Redeemer continued to droop. He, therefore, joined with Mr. T. Ulliyott, the messenger, in advising the friends at Boston to call Mr. Ebenezer Hall to preside over them. With this advice, the church complied ; and, May 22d. 1715, twenty-nine members signed the minutes of the church-meeting, by which he was called to the pastoral office. Twenty-seven others expressed their concurrence by letter : so that the society then consisted of fifty-six members. Mr. Hall appears to have been a respectable practitioner in physic, and a doctor of Medicine. He published several pieces on religious subjects. His eldership was terminated by death, Oct. 14th. 1722 ; when he had presided over this church no more than seven years. During this short period, thirty-one persons had been added to their number by baptism :

* Vol. I. pp. 129 and 319.

among whom were several who afterwards became ornaments to their profession, and great supports to the cause of their Saviour.

This society being thus left destitute, invited several neighbouring ministers to meet and consult on the proper measures to be adopted: who unanimously advised the calling of Mr. John Willey to preside over it. Mr. Willey, who formerly resided in the neighbourhood of Bourn, had been a member of the church at Spalding; and, in 1688, was reckoned among "the gifted brethren" in that congregation. But, having removed his dwelling to Boston, he became a member of the church in that town; and, probably, had occasionally preached amongst them during the whole of Mr. Hall's eldership. He was, therefore, unanimously invited to accept the pastoral office; and ordained by Mr. J. Hooke, Nov. 29th. 1722. The invitation given him was signed by fifty-five members. He did not continue long in this office: for, in May, 1729, he "voluntarily absented himself from the congregation." What induced him to withdraw from the sacred work does not appear: but it is evident, from the subsequent proceedings, that there was no imputation either on his moral or religious character.* Yet his services do not appear to have been either regular or satisfactory; as the church applied frequently, during his eldership, to the Lincolnshire association, for ministerial assistance. This was especially the case in 1724, when Messrs. J. Hooke, N. Locking, and J.

* This may fairly be inferred from his signing the agreement with Mr. Hursthause, his successor; and from provision being made in that agreement for his resuming the pastoral office, "if he pleased to assist as formerly and they pleased to have it so." *Boston Church Book.*

Hursthouse undertook to preach at Boston once a fortnight, “ till they should be otherwise supplied :” and, in 1725, when Mr. L. Isaac was requested to visit them as often as he could, for the purpose “ of keeping up order, and administering the ordinances to them.” In this uncertain and disorderly state of things, it is not surprizing that the cause of Christ should decline ; and that, in 1729, the number of effective members was reduced to little more than thirty.

On Mr. Willey’s final secession, the church resolved to request Mr. John Hursthouse to take them under his care. This respectable and pious minister was the younger son of Mr. Matthew Hursthouse, of Spalding, already mentioned.* He was then the elder of a flourishing general baptist church at Burgh and Monksthorpe ; but had removed his residence to Boston. As he appears to have had an acceptable assistant, who frequently supplied his place at Monksthorpe, he had opportunities of preaching for this church ; and his services were so well approved, that they solicited him to become their elder. With this request he complied, in June following ; after having obtained the consent of his own church. The church at Boston enjoyed his labours and vigilance for seven or eight years, and the work of the Lord prospered in his hands : as, when he resigned his charge, the members were more than eighty.

Mr. Hursthouse’s assistant at Monksthorpe being removed by death, in 1738, he found it necessary to leave Boston ; and, therefore, to dissolve his connection with that church. All parties acquiesced in this measure with less reluct-

* Supra. pp. 115, 116.

ance, as divine Providence appeared to have raised up a suitable person to fill the vacant office. Mr. John Goode had, for a considerable time, preached occasionally for them ; and, to use their own words, they “had made full proof of his doctrine, and observation of his conversation ; and believed him to be every way qualified to take upon him the office of an elder and pastor over a people ” He was, therefore, unanimously invited to assume the charge of this congregation ; and, Aug. 2d. 1738, was ordained by Mr. W. Johnson, messenger.

During the first years after Mr. Goode’s ordination, his labours were abundantly blessed, and additions to the church were numerous. But, it is probable, that, when he undertook the oversight of this society, discipline had been neglected : and when he endeavoured to revive it, he was but feebly supported by his friends. For, though meetings for this purpose were regularly held, during the whole time of his presiding over them, yet few attended at them, and the proceedings were often protracted to an injurious length. In 1744, Mr. Goode was chosen messenger of the churches ; and the duties of that station probably called him frequently from his own place. The cause, therefore, appears to have been less prosperous in the latter years of his ministry, than in the former : the additions were few, and the zeal and circumspection of too many of the more ancient members decreased. Such was the state of the church, when it pleased God to call him to his rest, Dec. 2d. 1751 ; in the affecting manner which we have had occasion to record in a former section.*

* Supra, p. 111.

For twelve years after Mr. Goode's decease, this church remained destitute of a pastor. It was supplied, for a great part of this interval, by Mr. Samuel Durance, who had removed from Leicester; but he was never called to the office of elder. Through the want of proper officers, the disorder increased, and the decline of the cause became more rapid. Yet a few additions were, from time to time, made to their numbers; and, from Mr. Goode's death, to 1760, fourteen were received by baptism, and thirteen by recommendation from sister churches.

Through these discouraging times, the interest at Boston owed much to the zeal and prudence of two valuable members, Messrs Thomas Saul and his son John. The former had been baptized under Mr. Hall, June 5th. 1720, and had continued an useful and steady friend to the cause through all the changes which it had experienced. His son had joined the church, Sept. 4th. 1753, and entered warmly into all the views and wishes of his worthy father. They exerted themselves in procuring ministers, and keeping up the worship of God, when too many neglected it. In 1762, they both attended the Lincolnshire association, where they heard Mr. W. Thompson preach, from Gal. vi. 15. The discourse gave them so much satisfaction, that they took an opportunity of conversing with the preacher.—Finding that there existed some opposition against his principles at Hull, where he then was settled, they earnestly invited him to remove to Boston; and gave him proper encouragement respecting his support. Mr. Thompson declined giving them a positive answer, at that time; but the contentions increasing on his return to Hull, he determined to pay a visit to Boston. His la-

hours were highly acceptable; and in July, the same year, twenty-seven of the members united in requesting him to become their stated preacher. He assented; and removed, with his family, to Boston, in the following September.

The cause of religion was then very low in this society. There were scarcely forty nominal members; and too many of these were irregular and ineffective. The place of worship was in a ruinous state; and the hearers few, and composed chiefly of the lowest classes of society. Mr. Thompson, however, pursued his great work with zealous diligence, and a humble dependance on the divine blessing for success. Nor were his hopes disappointed: a pleasing revival soon appeared; and, on Sept. 18th 1763, he baptized eight persons on a profession of faith. He was much encouraged by the affectionate sympathy of his friend, Mr. Saul; who manifested a truly parental solicitude for him and his family, and heartily entered into all his measures to promote the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom. But it pleased God, whose thoughts are not our thoughts, to deprive him, at the commencement of his labours, of this valuable friend: Mr. Thomas Saul died, June 13th. 1763, aged sixty-eight years. Mr. Thompson was deeply affected with this event, and preached a funeral sermon, at the request of the deceased, from 1 Cor. xv. 27: a passage very expressive of his own happy experience.

Mr. Saul's liberality to the poor, especially to poor saints and the ministers of the gospel, will long be gratefully remembered. He had observed, with pain, the decay of the place of worship occupied by the general baptists; and determined to provide more convenient accommodations. Just before his death, he laid the

foundation of a new meeting-house, in Goat-street, Boston. His son generously fulfilled the liberal intention of his father; and, having completed the building, at an expence of five hundred pounds, transferred it, and the ground on which it stood, to trustees, for the use of the church. It was opened, June 24th, 1764, by Mr. Dan Taylor, of Yorkshire, who delivered three discourses, on the occasion, to crowded audiences.

Being thus accommodated with a convenient place of worship, the congregations increased, and the external prospect was encouraging. But the internal concerns of the church were still disorganized: they had no officers, and proper discipline had long been neglected.* Messrs. Charles

* When this society resolved upon reviving discipline, they entered some reflections, and regulations for the prosecution of their object, on their records; which, as they may be useful to other churches in similar circumstances, we venture to transcribe.

"At our first meeting for the exercise of discipline, Aug. 27th. 1765, we took into consideration the present state of the church; and, upon inspection, finding many things wanted rectifying, with respect to church discipline and good government, according to the word of God, our only rule of faith and practice; we determined to do all that in us lies to revive and restore good order amongst us as a church of Christ. We look upon it, that, for some time past, public offenders have not been dealt with according to the mind of Christ; and that private offences have not been managed as the word of God directs. Some have gone astray; but have not been sought after, or admonished to return. Some have been under church censure for years; but have neither been admonished, in order to be reclaimed, nor excluded from standing as members. And several other disorders require our serious attention, and ought to be amended.

"1. We, therefore, whose names are under-written, do agree for the future, that any member who is guilty of adultery, fornication, theft, covetousness, extortion, or drunkenness, shall be informed of by the first member who becomes acquainted with such practices, who shall acquaint the church immediately, with-

Low and Stephen Small were, therefore, appointed to act as deacons ; and, Sept. 24th. 1764, Mr. Thompson was ordained to the pastoral office by Mr. G. Boyce. They also endeavoured to promote a conversation becoming the gospel, among the members, by holding meetings for discipline, and taking prudent steps to reclaim the wandering, or to withdraw from such as continued to walk disorderly. Private and family prayer, and the religious instruction of children and servants, were strongly recommended ; and a spirit of friendly vigilance over each other, encouraged. The great Head of the church was pleased to bless these exertions to the prosperity of his cause. The society increased in numbers and character ; and, at the commencement of the New Connection, in 1770, consisted of a pastor, two deacons, seventy-six members, and two young

out screening any person whatsoever : and that the person guilty of such atrocious crimes shall be dealt with by the church as the word of God directs, without partiality, according to the nature of the sin, and the circumstances attending it.

" 2 We further agree, that if any member of this church is guilty of disorderly walking, viz. working not, being a busy-body, tale-bearer, tattler, division-maker, or companion, unnecessarily, of carnal persons, or is proud and unfriendly, and of a conversation not according to the gospel of Christ, and is observed by a fellow-member so acting, the member who observes this disorderly conduct shall first admonish the offender in love, next take another or two with him, and repeat the admonition. If this fail, then the church must be made acquainted with it ; and, after they have admonished him, if he still persist in such practices, we must withdraw from every such person : that is, set him apart from having communion with us. Thus we judge we ought to act towards all private offenders whatsoever.

" 3. We further agree to seek up those who have already gone astray ; and to proceed as the scripture directs, in order to reclaim them, or otherwise to cut off all public offenders. We, therefore, appoint our brother Stephen Small, and our brother James Munk, to reprove and admonish," &c. &c.

preachers. Besides public service twice every Lord's-day, and frequent preaching in the neighbouring villages, they had a meeting on the Lord's-day evenings, "for prayer and recollection of the sermons;" and another on Tuesday evenings, "for christian conversation, prayer, singing, and communicating christian experience."

This church appears to have proceeded very orderly in joining itself to the New Connection. After Mr. Thompson's return from the first association, the Articles of Faith, agreed upon at that assembly were laid before the members, at a discipline meeting, for their approbation. When they had been three months under consideration, they were, by order of a subsequent meeting, copied into the church-book: and, at the close of them, this declaration affixed:—"We, whose names are hereunto annexed, do approve of the above articles; judging them to be agreeable to the scriptures of truth." To this declaration, the names of forty-nine members are subscribed. A similar minute records their desire to stand connected with the new assembly formed in London; and is signed by fifty-one members.*

* Boston Church Book—Lincolnshire Ass. Min.—D. Taylor's Memoirs of W. Thompson.—Min. Ass. N. C.

BOOK II.

THE HISTORY OF THE NEW CONNECTION OF
 ENGLISH GENERAL BAPTISTS, FROM ITS ORIGIN TO
 THE PRESENT TIME.

CHAP. I.

*THE FORMATION OF THE NEW CONNECTION,
 AND ITS HISTORY DURING THE PERIOD OF THE
 FIRST FIFTEEN YEARS.*

SECT. 1.—*The Formation of the New Connection.*

WE have distressing evidence, in the preceding Books, that a great diversity of opinion respecting some important parts of christian doctrine, caused, for a long series of years, very unpleasant altercations among the body of professors, who are the subject of this history. This was especially the case, soon after the middle of the last century, with the churches and ministers which composed the Lincolnshire Association. Some of them adhered to the principles which had distinguished the English General Baptists, in their best days ; and asserted, the Divinity of the Saviour—the Atonement made for sin by his death—Justification by Faith alone—and Regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Others either denied these doctrines entirely, or explained them in a manner which their friends thought detracted from their dignity, and opposed the oracles of truth. Too many of the old members of this association were of the latter description : and the principal supporters of the former were, Messrs. D. Taylor and William Thompson, who joined

that connection in 1763. Such a difference in sentiment naturally produced discussions when the ministers assembled ; and the result was, too frequently, an unpleasant degree of altercation.

During these disagreeable contests, Mr. Taylor became acquainted with the societies in the midland counties, which, as we have already seen,* were now respectable and numerous ; and he was much pleased to find that they esteemed the doctrines which were the subject of debate, as absolutely essential to christianity. This union in opinion, and the general excellence of their character, made him and his friends desirous of a closer connection with them. Several attempts were made, to induce them to join the Lincolnshire association : and Mr. Boyce, the messenger, visited Loughborough, to endeavour to accelerate this object. But the Leicestershire friends declined all these overtures ; and steadily declared that they would never have any connection with persons who maintained the opinions which, as they believed, were held by many of the Lincolnshire general baptists. They went farther ; and expressed their opinion very freely that all true friends of the genuine doctrines of christianity ought to separate from all who opposed them : at the same, stating their readiness to unite with the ministers whose sentiments they approved.

In the year 1769, disputes ran so high, both at the Lincolnshire association and the general assembly, and some circumstances of so disagreeable a nature took place, that many of the friends of the great truths already mentioned were led to conclude that a separation was necessary, for the

* Supra, Book I. Chap. I.

support of the cause of truth ; and, therefore, determined to withdraw themselves from their present associates. They made their intentions known to the Leicestershire churches ; and requested an interview, that measures might be prepared for carrying their design into effect. A meeting was accordingly held, at Lincoln, about Michaelmas, 1769 ; which was attended by Messrs Taylor and Thompson, from the old connection, and Mr. F. Smith, of Melbourn, Mr. Grimley, of Loughborough, and several other of the Leicestershire ministers. It was then resolved that a New Connection should be formed, of such as were assertors of the doctrines which had been so warmly debated : and that the first association of this New Connection should be held in London, June 7th. 1770 : at which the ministers from the midland counties promised to be present, if their churches approved of the proposed union. It is probable, that the place of meeting was appointed, to accommodate those general baptists in London and the adjacent counties, who, for similar reasons, were dissatisfied with the general assembly, and agreed in sentiments with the projectors of the New Connection; with whom, therefore, they were ready to co-operate.

This resolution of separating from their former friends, was not adopted by these good men without considerable reluctance. They considered the mischievous effects of all divisions, and hoped that, by patient endeavours, things might be brought into a better state : and, when they found that a separation was necessary for the peace and prosperity of the churches, they did not venture on that measure, before they had spent a considerable time in deliberation, correspondence, and prayer for divine direction.

And several ministers and churches, who agreed in doctrinal points with the seceders, fearing the consequences of dividing, continued, for many years, in the old connection. On the other hand, the most pious and worthy ministers, who favoured the opposite doctrines, were most earnest in opposing a measure, which, by dividing their strength, and distracting their efforts, would, they feared, prove very injurious to the general baptist cause. Mr. G. Boyce, the messenger of the baptized churches in Lincolnshire, appears to have laboured zealously to prevent the separation. For this purpose, he visited the congregations in the midland counties; had several interviews with Messrs. D. Taylor and Thompson, and frequently corresponded with them, especially with the former. This good man seems to have been greatly affected with the prospect of the division, and to have exerted all his eloquence to persuade his correspondents to abandon their design. In a letter to Mr. Taylor, dated Feb. 10th. 1770, he observes, “We separate from others, for very just causes and reasons ; but for us to separate one from another, what will the world say ? What a reproach and scandal will it bring upon us all, and upon our holy profession, and the Author of it ! O ! let it never be. My dear brother, let us take care what we do. Let us make use of every precaution, and take every necessary step that is possible to be taken, to prevent a separation. Let us carefully and constantly follow our meek and lowly Master, with the same temper, and imitate his most excellent example, and shew to all men that we are his disciples, by our love to one another.” “ Think, O think, and think again, what will be the consequence of a separation. Conclude nothing,

determine nothing; and, therefore, pursue no measure destructive of peace and unity. Consider how valuable these are, and of what great benefit and advantage to us all: how much good we may do for one another by steadily and constantly maintaining the same among ourselves. O how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!**

But the breach was now too wide to be closed by persuasion. To all this rhetoric the seceders calmly replied: "It is not to be doubted, if we regard the bible, that some of the vilest errors are, in this age, maintained by some of the general baptists, with as much warmth and zeal as they

* It may, perhaps, be acceptable to the reader, to see a statement of the difference in sentiment between the two parties, from the pen of this advocate for peace, who will not be suspected of a wish to exaggerate in his account of them.

In a letter, addressed to Mr D Taylor, dated May 16th. 1770, he says: "Let us now, therefore, come close to the point; and see wherein we agree, and wherein we differ. 1. You believe, according to what you have written to me, that pure Deity or Godhead is one, pure, simple, uncompounded, undivided Essence or Being, in which is contained all perfection. So do I. 2. I also understand you to believe, that this one all perfect Being, Deity, or Godhead, is self-existent, independent and eternal; infinite, unchangeable, and incomprehensible. So do I. In these two most august and grand points, we are agreed.—In the next place, you believe, or at least I understand you to believe, there are Three persons, distinct from each other, revealed to us under the titles or characters of Father, Son, and Holy-Ghost; and that these three Persons, do, independently of each other, *equally* possess all perfection: or, in other words, that these three Persons make up that one pure, simple, uncompounded undivided Deity: or, that these three persons, considered as above, are but one God. In this we differ.—2. You believe that Jesus Christ is the most high God. In this we differ.—3. You do not seem to believe that the person who is called the Word, John i. 1, came down from heaven. Herein we are not agreed.—These are the things in which we do not agree, and which we are to talk of, in order that we may agree."

have ever been by any party of men, in former ages. It behoves us, therefore, to take the alarm ; and, with all the little might we have, to militate against these pernicious tenets, which our fore-fathers so much abhorred, and the word of God so expressly condemns.” With such sentiments as these, no reconciliation could be expected : and the discontented party adhered to their resolution.

The proposed meeting was accordingly held, agreeably to the appointment, June 6th. 1770 ; at the meeting-house in Church Lane, White-chapel. This first Association was attended by Samuel Deacon, of Boston ; John Tarratt and Nathaniel Pickering, of Kegworth ; John Grimley, of Loughborough ; William Smith and George Hickling, of Longford ; Francis Smith and Thomas Perkins, of Melbourn: the ministers of the churches in the midland counties whose friends had cordially acceded to the proposal for an union. They were met by Dan Taylor, of Wadsworth, and William Thompson, of Boston, who had been connected with the Lincolnshire association ; John Brittain, of Church Lane, London ; William Summers, of the Park, Southwark ; John Knott, of Eythorn ; James Fenn, of Deal ; J. Stanger, of Bessell’s Green ; David Wilkin, of Halsted ; Charles Parman, of Castle-Headingham ; and R. French, of Coggeshall.

Previous to any definitive measures, it was thought proper to take a respectful leave of their former associates in the general assembly, which was then sitting in London : and a deputation was sent, June 6th. to that meeting,—to acquaint them with their design of withdrawing from their connection—to assign the reason for the separation—and, in a friendly manner, to bid

them farewell. The following morning, Mr. D. Taylor preached from 2 Tim. i. 8: "Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." In the afternoon, the ministers and representatives assembled to prosecute the purpose of their meeting; when Mr. D. Taylor, was called to the chair, and Messrs. J. Knott and W. Thompson were chosen moderators. After solemn prayer to the Father of lights, for his direction and blessing, an union was formed under the designation of "The New Connection of General Baptists,* formed in 1770; with a design to revive Experimental Religion or Primitive Christianity in Faith and Practice." And, in order that it might be known what they considered as the faith and practice of primitive christianity, six "Articles of Religion were proposed, agreed upon, and signed :" not as a perfect creed of the new party ; but principally as a declaration of their views on those points which had been the chief subjects of debate, between them and their former associates. These articles are thus expressed, in the original record.

"ARTICLE 1. *On the Fall of Man.* We believe, that man was made upright in the image of God, free from all disorder natural and moral ; capable of obeying perfectly the will and command of God his Maker ; yet capable also of

* At the head of the Minutes of the first Association, they were styled "an Assembly of *Free-Grace* General Baptists." This appellation was, at their formation, frequently given them, especially in London, to distinguish them from the Old churches of General Baptists : and, from finding it in this situation, it would seem that, though it has been long disused, they formerly recognized it. It is highly desirable, that some convenient designation could be adopted, that would distinguish things that differ.

sinning: which he unhappily did, and thereby laid himself under the divine curse; which, we think, could include nothing less than the mortality of the body and the eternal punishment of the soul. His nature also became depraved; his mind was defiled; and the powers of his soul weakened—that both he was, and his posterity are, captives of Satan till set at liberty by Christ."

"ARTICLE 2. *On the Nature and perpetual Obligation of the Moral Law.* We believe, that the moral law not only extends to the outward actions of the life, but to all the powers and faculties of the mind, to every desire, temper and thought; that it demands the entire devotion of all the powers and faculties of both body and soul to God: or, in our Lord's words, to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength:—that this law is of perpetual duration and obligation, to all men, at all times, and in all places or parts of the world. And, we suppose that this law was obligatory to Adam in his perfect state—was more clearly revealed in the ten commandments—and more fully explained in many other parts of the bible."

"ARTICLE 3. *On the Person and Work of Christ.* We believe, that our Lord Jesus Christ is God and man, united in one person: or possessed of divine perfection united to human nature, in a way which we pretend not to explain, but think ourselves bound by the word of God firmly to believe:—that he suffered to make a full atonement for all the sins of all men—and that hereby he has wrought out for us a compleat salvation; which is received by, and as a free gift communicated to, all that believe in him; without the consideration of any works done by us, in order to entitle us to this salvation.—Though we

firmlly believe, that no faith is the means of justification, but that which produces good works."

"ARTICLE 4. *On Salvation by Faith.* We believe, that as this salvation is held forth to all to whom the gospel revelation comes without exception, we ought in the course of our ministry, to propose or offer this salvation to all those who attend our ministry: and, having opened to them their ruined wretched state by nature and practice, to invite all, without exception, to look to Christ by faith, without any regard to any thing in, or done by, themselves; that they may, in this way alone, that is, by faith, be possessed of this salvation."

"ARTICLE 5. *On Regeneration by the Holy Spirit.* We believe, that, as the scriptures assure us, we are justified, made the children of God, purified and sanctified by faith:—that when a person comes to believe in Jesus (and not before) he is regenerated or renewed in his soul, by the spirit of God, through the instrumentality of the word, now believed and embraced; which renewal of his soul naturally produces holiness in heart and life:—that this holiness is the means of preparing us for the enjoyments and employments of the heavenly world; and of preserving in our souls a comfortable sense of our interest in the Lord, and of our title to glory; as well as to set a good example before men, and to recommend our blessed Redeemer's cause to the world."

"ARTICLE 6. *On Baptism.* We believe, that it is the indispensable duty of all who repent and believe the gospel, to be baptized, by immersion in water, in order to be initiated into a church state; and that no person ought to be received

into the church without submission to that ordinance."

SIGNED,

Dan Taylor	William Smith	Geo. Hickling
David Wilkin	Samuel Deacon	John Tarratt
W. Thompson	James Fenn	Robert French
John Knott	Francis Smith	N. Pickering
John Stanger	Thomas Perkins	Charles Parman
John Brittain	John Grimley	W. Summers
Henry Poole.		

The persons who composed this assembly had long seen, with heart-felt regret, the mischiefs arising from a laxity of principle. They beheld the once flourishing interest of the general baptists languishing, and ready to expire; and they were persuaded, that the fatal cause of this affecting decline had been the neglect of what they esteemed the distinguishing doctrines of christianity, and the introduction of theories and speculations inconsistent with them. They, therefore, were anxious to guard the New Connection from those quicksands, which had nearly swallowed up their predecessors; and prefaced the above articles with this Resolution. "We agree, that no minister be permitted to join this assembly, who does not subscribe the articles we have now agreed upon: and that those who do subscribe, and afterwards depart from them, shall be considered as no longer belonging to this assembly." Under the same impressions, they wished to guard their churches, as well as the assembly, from the infection of false doctrine. They inquired, at the first association, "Is it not absolutely unscriptural and irregular for any member of this assembly to admit any person, who is not a member of this assembly, to preach for him, under any circumstances whatever?" But, zealous

as they were for uniformity, many of them were so intimately connected with ministers of the old connection, that they objected to this undistinguishing exclusion ; and, after considerable discussion, at this and the following association, it was at last left in these general terms : “ We agree that we will all endeavour, by all means, to have, at all times, when we have need of help, such as are agreed with us in sentiment.”

But these fathers of the New Connection thought it necessary, in order that their hearts might be still more closely united, and their co-operation more cordial, that they should have full evidence, not only of the soundness of each other’s faith, but of the genuineness of each other’s piety. It was, therefore, agreed, at their first meeting, “ that every minister do, at the next assembly, give an account of his religious experience, that they may be satisfied concerning the reality of each other’s conversion.”

The second association of the New Connection was held at London, May 22d. 23d. and 24th. 1771 ; and was attended by the same persons nearly as the former meeting. On the evening of the first day, Mr. W. Thompson preached, from Matt. ix. 36—38 : and, on the following evening, Mr. Donisthorpe, from John iii. 36. A great part of the time, on this occasion, was occupied by the ministers, in relating their religious experience, according to the agreement of last year. If we may judge of the rest of these relations from the only one which has fallen under our notice, this must have been a very interesting and edifying opportunity.*

* The account which Mr. Francis Smith, of Melbourn, read to his brethren, on this occasion, is preserved in the Gen. Bap. Mag. Vol. I. pp. 263—267.

Though the separation from the old connection had proceeded thus far, it appears, that the hope of a reunion was not entirely relinquished by either party. In November, 1770, Mr. W. Thompson had taken the "Six Articles of Religion," which had been subscribed at the formation of the New Connection, to a meeting of ministers, belonging to the Lincolnshire association, held at Coningsby. Those ministers, who continued desirous of an accommodation, agreed to send a copy of the Articles to each of their churches, for their consideration. At the next Lincolnshire association, the answers were received: and every church objected to some part or other of the Articles, and therefore refused to sign them. That assembly, however, requested Mr. Boyce to arrange and transcribe the various objections; to communicate them to the ensuing association of the New Connection, and to desire their answer. The exceptions were, accordingly, presented to the second association at London: and Mr. D. Taylor was employed to draw up a short explanation of the Articles, by way of reply, and transmit it to Mr. Boyce. This he accordingly did; which, for that time, closed the correspondence.

But the principal business of the second association, was, the division of the New Connection into two associations. It was considered, that some of the churches lying at a considerable distance from each other, the assembling annually, in one body, would be attended with great expence of money and time. They agreed, therefore, for mutual convenience, to establish two associations: one in the north, and the other in the south. The former included the midland churches, together with those in the counties of

York and Lincoln: and the latter, those in London, Kent, Essex and Surry; and it was proposed to keep up the connection, by sending a representative from one association to the other. The first meeting of the northern association was appointed to be held at Loughborough; and of the southern at Bessell's Green. But the southern societies soon laid aside their annual interviews: the cause decayed, and several of the churches have long since disappeared.

The first northern association met, agreeably to the appointment, at Loughborough, June 3rd and 4th 1772; and was composed of the ministers and representatives of the churches at Loughborough, Kegworth, Barton, Melbourn, Longford, Boston, and Wadsworth. John Stanger and Samuel Benge were likewise present, as the representatives of the southern association.

The seven churches just mentioned must be considered as forming the basis of the New Connection: Fleet church having withdrawn from the union in the preceding year, and rejoined the Lincolnshire association. The number of members in these seven churches amounted, in 1772, to one thousand, two hundred and twenty-one.*

The Connection, thus formed, has continued to increase in numbers and respectability. In order to place its history in a clear and connected view, we will endeavour to trace the proceedings of the different churches during the first fifteen years after its formation: and then to take a survey of the more public transactions of the whole body through the same period. A similar plan will

* Min. Asso. of N. C. 1770—1772.—Min. Linc. Asso. 1771, and 1772—G. B. R. Vol. II. pp. 75—81. Boyce's M. S.—P. I.

conduct us through the succeeding periods, down to the present time.

SECT. 2.—The History of the General Baptist Churches in the Midland Counties, during the first Fifteen Years after the Commencement of the New Connection.

BARTON,* the original general baptist church in the midland counties, had, at the formation of the New Connection, suffered much from the unhappy fate of Mr. Whyatt. Occasion was given to the enemies of religion to blaspheme; and the harmony of the society was interrupted. Mr. Deacon, the only remaining pastor, was unable to occupy all the usual places of meeting: and many of them were either relinquished, or supplied with persons very unfit for the work. The cause, therefore, began evidently to decline; but it pleased God to send them unexpected help. Mr. John Yates, of Hugglescote, who had formerly been one of their members, had, some time previous to this date, joined the particular baptist church at Sheepshead: and was called to preach, occasionally, by that society. Not being perfectly satisfied, however, with his new connection, he returned, in 1772, to his old friends at Barton. They received him gladly; and immediately employed him in the work of the ministry. His labours were acceptable and useful; and he was ordained co-pastor with Mr. Deacon. The ministers cordially united in building up the walls of Zion; and the drooping cause

* Supra p. 47.

rapidly revived. But the hopes of the friends of the truth were painfully disappointed, and the bright prospect suddenly clouded. Mr. Yates, their beloved pastor, died, Dec 10th 1773, in the thirty-sixth year of his age; leaving a pregnant widow, and five small children, to mourn his premature removal.

This affecting dispensation of divine Providence plunged the church again into darkness and difficulty. Though the neighbouring ministers kindly assisted Mr. Deacon, as often as circumstances permitted, in supplying the numerous places at which public worship was established; yet, distance of place, and numerous other causes, rendered their visits precarious, and gave rise to frequent disappointments. Anxious to obtain a more regular supply, they turned their attention to Mr. Benjamin Wootton, a promising young minister in Kegworth church. But, though they used every proper means to obtain him, and though the association, in 1777, recommended his removal to Barton; yet the friends at Kegworth refused to part with him. This disappointment was more sensibly felt, as, at the same time, difference in sentiment, and disorder in practice, troubled the peace of the church; and prevented the prosperity of the cause of the Redeemer.

During these gloomy days, several of the more pious and thoughtful members endeavoured to supply those places for which preachers could not be obtained, by prayer meetings. These services were, in general, well attended, and conducted with propriety. They not only supplied vacant opportunities, but had a happy tendency to discover and cultivate useful gifts. Several young men were thus brought into notice, who afterwards became acceptable ministers in various

parts of the connection. Among others, Mr. S. Deacon, jun., the eldest son of their pastor, was induced to assist in these meetings for prayer, and was favourably received. His friends soon encouraged him to attempt to preach; and so highly approved his labours, that they unanimously invited him to share the pastoral office with his respected father. He was ordained, in 1779. This event had a pleasing effect on the state of religion in the church. The divisions and jealousies, that had distracted the society ever since Mr. Whyatt's exclusion, subsided; and the members and pastors laboured together, with great harmony, in spreading the gospel of the glorious Redeemer among perishing sinners.

Towards the close of this period, Mr. John Deacon, a younger son of their pastor, commenced preacher, and was frequently employed till he settled at Leicester. Mr. Thomas Orton, now of Hugglescote, Mr. J. Brewin, who long laboured for this church as an assistant minister, and several others, began also to exercise their gifts in preaching. Yet, with all these means, the cause remained almost stationary. Many of their old and most respectable members died, and others did not arise in their places. In 1785, they complain that "the state of religion was low, especially in some, though they hoped that others were firm in the faith:—that they were much reduced in earthly things; having very few who had any thing more than necessaries." The number of members then amounted to one hundred and thirty-nine.

The church at *Melbourn** continued, through

* Supra, p. 59.

the whole of this period, to flourish, under the joint pastoral care of Messrs. Francis Smith and Thomas Perkins; who generally laboured alternately at Melbourn and Packington, the two principal stations. But preaching was regularly maintained at a number of other places, which increased as the cause spread; and required the assistance of other labourers. Several young men, of respectable abilities, were raised up in their own church, whose services were both acceptable and useful. Among these were, Thomas Mee, of Packington, who was called to the ministry in 1777, and was frequently employed among them for eighteen years; John Smedley, who commenced preaching in 1782, and continued his labours, in various parts of the church, till he settled at Retford, in 1794; and Job Burditt, of whom we shall have to speak on another occasion.

Being thus plentifully supplied with ministers, the cause regularly extended itself. The congregation at Melbourn increased, till it was found convenient, in 1782, to raise the walls of the meeting-house, and erect galleries. This alteration cost ninety pounds, which they liberally raised by subscription among themselves. The number of members nearly doubled during this period; amounting, in 1785, to three hundred and five.

Among other places, to which the friends at Melbourn carried the gospel, was *Cauldwell*, a pleasant, though small village, on the confines of Staffordshire, four miles from Burton upon Trent, and twelve from Litchfield. Joseph Norton, an inhabitant of this place, was induced to hear the general baptist ministers, at Packington. His

mind was affected with the great truths which he heard: and he was convinced of his lost state by nature. After some time, he obtained peace in believing; was baptized, and joined the church at Melbourn. It appears, that, when he set out in the ways of religion, though he was a married man, and had several young children, yet he dwelt with his father, who was a person of some property, and was in a great measure dependant on him. This gentleman had imbibed strong prejudices against the Melbourn preachers; and frequently called them "false prophets, and a paltry set of hirelings who ran before they were sent." He, therefore, violently opposed his son's connection with persons whom he both despised and hated: and threatened, if he did not forsake them, to turn him and his infant family out of doors. But his threats made this sincere christian cleave to his Saviour, and pursue the one thing needful, with greater ardour. He persevered in a constant attendance on the means of grace at Melbourn and Packington; though the former was twelve, and the latter nine miles from the place of his residence.

As his knowledge of the gospel, and his enjoyment of its blessings increased, his desire that his neighbours, and especially his relatives, should partake of the same mercies, proportionably augmented. He laboured strenuously to engage his acquaintance to accompany him to Melbourn and Packington: and, sometimes, with such success, that he has taken twenty companions, at once, to hear the gospel; many of whom found it the power of God to the salvation of their souls. But, it required more address to remove the prejudices of his father; yet the filial piety of the son caused him to feel peculiarly anxious for the

eternal happiness of his parent. He, therefore, determined, in dependance on the divine blessing, to make the attempt. Knowing the unhappy prepossessions of his father against the Melbourn preachers, he thought it more prudent to procure a stranger to commence the operations ; and engaged Mr. Abraham Austin, of Sutton Colefield, to preach at Cauldwell, when a door of entrance should be opened. Mr. Norton, then, having concerted his plan with one of his friends, informed his father that Mr. Austin proposed visiting him, on such a day, and might perhaps be prevailed on to preach, if a proper place could be found ;—but that, fearing his father might not be prepared to receive him, or might be afraid of the reflections of his neighbours, he had applied to another person in the village, who was very willing that the service should be held at his house. This address had the desired effect. It roused the pride of the old man, who, as he occupied his own estate, affected to act with great spirit, and was piqued that any of his neighbours should be thought more independent than himself. He immediately replied, “Mr. Austin shall not seek any other accommodations ; but shall preach in my house.” Notice was accordingly given : Mr. Austin came ; and preached to a numerous and attentive congregation. His host was well pleased with the service ; and frequently observed afterwards, that it was a good discourse.

Mr. Norton was encouraged by his father’s approbation of this sermon : and assured him that the ministers at Melbourn, of whom he entertained so bad an opinion, preached exactly the same doctrines as Mr. Austin. At length, the old gentleman expressed a willingness to hear

them ; and authorized his son to invite them to Cauldwell. Messrs. Smith and Perkins eagerly accepted the invitation : and, without waiting for much solicitation, repeated their visits. In a short time, Mr. Norton had the heart-felt satisfaction of seeing his venerable parent lay aside his prejudices, and submit to the truth. He was baptized, and joined the church at Melbourn. Several of his neighbours following his example, public worship was established in the village, and a room licensed for that purpose. At first, the service was only once a fortnight, on the Thursday evening ; but the prospect continuing to improve, preaching was commenced regularly every Lord's-day. Notwithstanding considerable opposition, the cause gained ground, and the hearers increased ; till the room which they had hired became too small to accommodate them. A meeting-house, therefore, became necessary : and Mr. Norton, sen. who was now zealous to support the faith which he so lately wished to destroy, generously gave them a piece of land for a meeting-house and burying-ground. The friends exerted themselves liberally on the occasion ; and a commodious meeting-house was erected, at an expence of one hundred and eighty pounds, which was opened in 1778.

The success of the gospel at Cauldwell alarmed its enemies. A spirit of persecution arose against the baptists ; the chief weight of which fell on Mr. Joseph Norton, who was considered as the chief ringleader of the sect. He was stigmatized as “a pestilent fellow, a mover of sedition, and a disturber of the tranquillity of a peaceful village.” Not content with these harmless effusions of spite, which the good man would have smiled at and forgiven, they endeavoured to injure him

in his temporal concerns. He was a shoe-maker: and, in order to deprive him of the means of procuring an honest subsistence, they encouraged another of the same trade to settle in the village. Mr. Norton, however, continued to pursue the great objects in which he had engaged with undiminished ardor: but, while he was earnestly labouring to spread the knowledge of the gospel, he was peculiarly diligent, obliging, punctual and honest in his worldly business. The blessing of Him, in whose hands are the hearts of all men, succeeded his endeavours: and, in a short time, his opponent was obliged to retreat with loss and disgrace. Several of his christian friends endured similar persecution; but all was overruled by a gracious Providence, even to their temporal advantage. They found, by blessed experience, that “godliness is profitable for all things; having the promise of this life, and of that which is to come.”

About two years after the opening of the new meeting-house, Job Burditt, a native of Cauldwell, a young man of promising abilities, was called to the work of the ministry. His labours were so highly approved by his neighbours, that he became, in a great measure, the regular preacher in that branch of the church. The cause increased under his ministrations: and, in 1785, forty of the inhabitants of Cauldwell and its neighbourhood stood as members of the society at Melbourn.

The church at *Kegworth*, under Messrs. Nathaniel Pickering and John Tarratt, received considerable additions soon after the formation of the New Connection. The increase of the cause rendered more labourers necessary: and, in 1771,

Benjamin Wootton, one of their members, was called to the work of the ministry. He was a promising young man; sober-minded, thoughtful, and fond of reading. His ministry was acceptable, and the congregation was much attached to him. In 1775, another young member, William Corah, was encouraged to preach. He was a person of very different character: his mind was uncultivated, and he had no taste for study, nor even for general reading. His discourses were remarkable for evangelical doctrine, simplicity of idea, and homeliness of expression; but they often reached the hearts and consciences of the hearers with amazing power.* About the time that Mr. Corah commenced his labours, preaching was introduced into Belton, a place five miles north-west of Kegworth; and, in the following year, a dwelling-house was licensed for the same purpose at Thurgaton, another neighbouring village.

For several succeeding years, the cause was carried on by the pastors, ministers, and people, with great energy and success. The public services were well attended; and many joined themselves to the church: so that, in 1781, the members amounted to two hundred and eighty-two,

* Of this, a worthy minister, to whose friendship we are indebted for many of the particulars in this account, gives the following instance.

"When about seventeen years of age, I was attentively hearing Mr Corah. In his sermon, he quoted John iii. 16, 'God so loved the world,' &c. 'God so loved the world,' said he. How much?—This little word SO—Ye *canna* fathom it.' I have heard many able preachers, many excellent sermons, and striking remarks; but none was ever so blessed to me as this. It led to a train of meditations on the greatness of the love of God, which, it is hoped, as a means, made it answer the end of its manifestation."

and the church was harmonious. But, in the following year, this harmony was interrupted, and the progress of the gospel received a deplorable check. Mr. Wootton, who was naturally disposed to speculate, had indulged this disposition so far, as to embrace some tenets favouring the socinian system. This change of sentiment discovered itself in his public discourses, and caused no small uneasiness among his friends. A day was appointed for the investigation of the unpleasant business :—but, though four neighbouring ministers had been invited to assist the church, on this occasion, nothing effectual was done. The alarm increased : the society was again assembled to deliberate on this subject ; and Mr. Dan Taylor was sent for to assist them. This discussion proved final. Mr. Wootton's views were fairly developed, and their pernicious tendency exposed : his arguments were refuted, and objections answered. The people were convinced that he ought not to be encouraged ; and withdrew their fellowship from him. Seventeen members adhered to him ; among whom were two or three officers and trustees of the meeting-house. This circumstance occasioned considerable trouble for some years : but, by these proceedings, the church was purged from such speculations ; and has never since been infested with them. Mr. Wootton, after the separation, attempted to preach, for a short time ; but his followers dwindled away : and, though he maintained an excellent moral character, through a long life, yet he could not succeed in forming a party.

In this year, Mr. John Goddard, who resided at Little Hallam, was called, by his brethren, to the work of the ministry. He was a youth of good

natural abilities : his preaching was very acceptable, and attended with considerable success.—The following year, a new meeting-house was opened at Sawley ; chiefly through the liberality of two worthy individuals : Mr. Joseph Parkinson, of that place, devoting a building of his own to the purpose ; and Mr. John Stenson, at his private expence, furnishing it with seats. Mr. Tarratt preached the first sermon in it, in the autumn of 1783. About the same time, the ministers of this church commenced preaching, once a fortnight, at Hathern : and, in a few months afterwards, established regular meetings at Sutton Bonington, a village two miles east of Kegworth ; where numbers attended, and heard with profit.

In 1784, the meeting-house at Little Hallam was taken down, and a more substantial and commodious one erected, in its stead, at Ilkiston ; a considerable town a mile northward of the former place. The ground on which the old building stood was not the property of the church, and the situation was very ineligible. The removal, therefore, was thought necessary ; and experience has shewn, that it has conduced much to the prosperity of religion in that neighbourhood.

This society had now spread over many towns and villages : from Sawley on the north, to Belton on the south, was a distance of twenty miles. Though the extent of the cause furnished ground for gratitude, yet it was productive of much inconvenience in transacting the business of the society. Many of the members were obliged to travel twenty or thirty miles in the day, to enjoy the privileges of the sanctuary. And, though the Lord's supper was administered and church-meetings held, monthly, many of these zealous

christians cheerfully supported this fatigue ; and were punctual in their attendance. But Mr. Goddard residing in Derbyshire, and being well approved by the friends in that neighbourhood, suggested the propriety of dividing this large society into distinct and independent churches. This subject was taken seriously into consideration, early in 1785. The chief difficulty arose from the heavy debt which remained on the meeting-house at Ilkiston. But, considering the weakness of the interest in that place, the other branches of the society generously took the greatest part of the burden on themselves. The business was, therefore, brought to a final arrangement : and, May 22nd. 1785, a friendly separation was completed. The societies which arose from this division, were, *Ilkiston church*, including Smalley, which consisted of fifty members, under the care of Mr. Goddard ; *Castle-Donington church*, including Sawley, which consisted of seventy members, under the care of Mr. N. Pickering : and *Kegworth*, which comprehended Kegworth, Diseworth, Belton, Long Whatton, and Sutton Bonington ; and consisted of one hundred and nine members, with whom Mr. John Tarratt remained as pastor, and Mr. Corah as assistant minister.*

At *Loughborough*,† Messrs. Grimley and Donisthorpe continued to preach the gospel, and superintend the church with unabated zeal and success. The cause prospered in their hands :—

* The number of members in these churches is copied from the Minutes of the succeeding Association, in 1786 : and, therefore, may not, probably, exhibit the exact state of each at the period of separation.

† Supra, pp. 53 and 54.

numbers joining the society in the places where regular preaching was established; and new doors for usefulness, from time to time, opening before them. But, in the midst of these flattering prospects, the cause sustained a heavy loss by the death of Mr. Donisthorpe. This active servant of Christ had often expressed, to his intimate friends, a wish that he might die preaching the gospel: and his request was, in a good degree, granted. On the last Tuesday in May, 1774, he went to deliver an evening lecture at the meeting-house in Loughborough: when, having prayed with his usual fervour, he proceeded to give out a hymn. While he read the two first lines, his voice faltered, and he sunk into the pulpit.* His friends instantly went up to his assistance, and conveyed him to a neighbouring house. Intelligence was sent, without delay, to his family; but before any of them arrived he was speechless. He was taken home in a chaise, and medical advice procured: but all efforts were ineffectual.—After lying in a state of insensibility till the following Tuesday evening, he expired, in the seventy-second year of his age.

This stroke was heavy, and the loss great: but it was, in some good measure, repaired by the labours of Richard Thurman, who, about this time, began to exercise in prayer and expounding the scriptures, at the private meetings; and was, soon afterwards, encouraged by his brethren to preach in public. Thus they were enabled to continue regular services at the different places;

* The two lines, with which this minister closed his labours in the church militant, were these:

“The land of triumph lies on high;

“There are no fields of battle there!”

and Mr. Grimley was, by his age and experience, well qualified to discharge the duties of the pastoral office, which now wholly devolved on him. In a few years, the Lord of the harvest sent other labourers into this part of the vineyard. Mr. B. Pollard, of Swithland, was discovered to possess ministerial abilities ; and, in March, 1779, was, after satisfactory previous trial, requested to employ them for the advantage of the church. With this request he complied ; and his labours were acceptable and useful.

The year following was distinguished by a revival in various parts of this extended church ; particularly at Quorndon, and the neighbouring villages. Upwards of one hundred at once professed their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, by offering themselves as candidates for baptism and fellowship. A few of these afterwards turned back to the world ; many of them, there is good reason to believe, have joined the church above ; and several remain, to the present day, ornaments to the church below. Among these, we may reckon Mr. Robert Smith, now of Nottingham. About the same time, Mr. Joseph Freeston, a schoolmaster at Grimston, who had lost his situation for refusing to teach the catechism of the church of England, was kindly patronized by Mr. Hutchinson, of Loughborough. He took Mr. Freeston into his house, and furnished him with a convenient room for a school, which he conducted with great success. Messrs. Smith and Freeston were called to the ministry in the year 1780 ; and their assistance strengthened the hands of their brethren, and promoted the success of the cause. The church at Loughborough, at this flourishing season, was not only liberally supplied with the means of grace itself ; but oc-

casionally assisted Nottingham, Kirkby-Woodhouse and Ashford ; as all these churches were, at that time, destitute of ministers.

About the same time, Mr. Thomas Simpson, a member of this society, who resided at Rothley, began to attempt to preach to his neighbours. Though these attempts were not sanctioned by the church, they opened a door for the introduction of the gospel into that village, of which the zealous ministers at Loughborough did not fail to avail themselves. They commenced their labours there in a decayed old barn ; and were often obliged to remove from place to place ; yet their efforts were successful, and the cause took deep root in this neighbourhood.

Edward Johnson, a worthy general baptist, and a member of the same church, had been turned out of a profitable farm at Swithland, on account of his religion ; and had settled at Woodhouse-Eaves, a village about three miles south of Loughborough. Not deterred by the persecution which he had already suffered, he cheerfully opened his house, in 1780, for the preaching of the gospel. Many attended ; and a foundation was laid, on which a separate interest has since been raised.

By the progressive spread of the cause, and the accession of members from various places, this church had now become inconveniently large. The distance of the members from each other, rendered it extremely difficult to meet together at the Lord's table, or for purposes of discipline : the ministers were subjected to great toil in taking such extensive circuits, to attend the Lord's-days' and evening services at places so far separated from each other : the expences incurred by these journeys were a heavy burden on the funds of the

church : and it was found impossible for one pastor to exercise a proper vigilance over so numerous and scattered a people. All these considerations evinced the necessity of dividing this large society ; which was carried into effect, in 1782. Two independent churches were then formed : the one including *Loughborough* and the neighbouring villages ; the other comprising *Leake* and *Wimeswould*, with the places in their vicinity. The former, at the time of the division, consisted of two hundred and ninety members ; and the latter, of one hundred and fifty-four.*—Mr. Grimley continued pastor over *Loughborough* church ; and Mr. Richard Thurman was ordained to the same office over the church at *Leake*.

After this separation, the ministers at *Loughborough* continued their labours, with increasing vigour. The old barns at *Rothley* soon became too small for the accommodation of the numbers who crowded to hear the words of life. A new built and capacious barn was, therefore, hired for twelve years ; fitted up in a comfortable manner ; and opened, Nov. 20th. 1785. At that time, this church consisted of two hundred and seventy-nine members ; maintained preaching regularly at four places ; were tolerably well attended with hearers ; and a few waiting for baptism. But they lament the fewness of those who gave evidence of real conversion, and the low degree of love and zeal which appeared in too many of the members.

* The numbers here differ a little from the statement in G. B. R. Vol. II. p. 8 ; but as this account is taken from the *Minutes of the Association in 1783*, which probably were not in the possession of the writer in the G. B. R., it is presumed to be more accurate.

The church at *Leake*, when it divided from Loughborough, maintained regular preaching at Leake, Wimeswould and Widmerpool: and soon afterwards carried the gospel into Broughton; where, at the close of this period, they preached once a fortnight. The preachers had early penetrated into these parts, as we have already seen; and a meeting-house had been erected at Leake in 1756.* At Wimeswould, after preaching a considerable time in private houses, a meeting-house was opened, in 1781. The blessing of the great Head of the church succeeded the efforts of his servants. Several were added to the church by baptism, during the first years of its existence as a distinct church; but, from various causes, nearly as many were lost from the society: so that, in 1785, the members amounted to one hundred and fifty-nine; when they hoped that religion was on the advancee.

During this period, the attention of the ministers at Loughborough was drawn to *Leicester*. There had existed a general baptist church in that city, for more than a century previous to the formation of the New Connection.† It was then almost extinct. A few scattered persons, indeed, remained, who professed themselves members of it: but, it is probable, the society would have been entirely dissolved, had not an endowment preserved the shadow of a church. An infirm old man, of the name of Green, who lived at Earl-Shilton, then enjoyed the property, as nominal elder: and preached five or six times a year to the few who chose to hear him.

Such had, for a long time, been the state of

* *Supra*, pp. 36—38. † Vol. I. pp. 160, 237.

things, when, in 1781, a family of the name of Brothers, the heads of which were members of the church at Loughborough, went to reside at Leicester. Some months after their removal, one of their children died: and, as it was unbaptized, it could not be interred in the church-yard.— They sent, therefore, a request to their own ministers to come over, and assist at the funeral, in the burying-ground belonging to the old general baptists. By the advice of Mr. Grimley, Mr. B. Pollard went; and preached on the occasion to the friends of the deceased, and a few of the ancient members, whom the relatives had invited to attend. After the funeral, they supped with the mourning family; and some close conversation took place respecting the state of the church and of vital religion in their own hearts. In the course of the evening, one of the members of the original church addressed Mr. Pollard, with great earnestness, in these affecting terms : “Young man, we are six of us now with you ; and we are all apostates.” Roused to a sense of the danger of their condition, they united in wishing for a revival, both in their own souls, and in the venerable society to which they belonged ; and, believing that such preaching as they had just heard would be the most likely means, under the blessing of God, to produce such a desirable change, they joined in requesting that the New Connection would supply them with preachers.

This request was laid before the ministers of the adjacent churches : and, though these zealous men had made an ineffectual attempt, a few years before, to introduce their interest into Leicester, yet they embraced with pleasure this unexpected opening. A regular supply was therefore arranged ; which was furnished alternately by

the churches at Barton and Loughborough.— Their labours were attended with encouraging success. A decent congregation was collected ; and several of the nominal members became earnest in attending to the things which made for their eternal happiness.

In a short time after regular preaching had been established at Leicester, Mr. J. Deacon, who had been some time preparing for the ministry, under Mr. D. Taylor, returned to his native county. As he was an acceptable preacher, and more at liberty than many of the other ministers, he frequently supplied Leicester. The people formed a strong attachment to him, and began to wish to enjoy his labours more constantly. In order to this, fourteen of the members who had formerly belonged to this society, re-established their church, Sept. 1782 ; and invited Mr. Deacon to preach for them. To this he consented : and a remarkable alteration soon appeared. In the course of the following year, twenty-four persons were added to the church by baptism, and ten were received from other churches. Their number, therefore, amounted to forty-eight, in June 1783 ; when they were admitted into the New Connection. At that time, nine persons were waiting for admission, the public services were well attended and frequently crowded, and good effects appeared to have been produced by preaching in the country places around Leicester.

This revival of the cause rendered the old meeting-house too little to accommodate the increasing congregation; and they exerted themselves zealously in erecting a new and spacious building, which they completed in 1785 ; when their members had increased to seventy-five, and religion appeared on the advance;

We have very little information respecting the remaining branch of the original division : the small church at *Kirkby-Woodhouse*.* It joined the New Connection in 1773, when Mr. John Alvery, who seems to have sustained the office of ruling elder, attended, as its representative, at the association. The members then were thirty-one ; and they complain of “standing in need of a stated ministry.” The reason for this complaint continued throughout the period under review : and they depended on the occasional assistance of the ministers of surrounding churches. Distance of situation rendered this mode of supply very uncertain, and inadequate to the prosperity of the cause. The church felt the effects of its destitute situation, and gradually declined. In 1783, they informed the association,—that there were only twenty-one members—that it was feared several of them were in a “very poor state”—and that they had reason to complain of formality, and of enjoying no prospect of addition to their number. This discouraging account concludes our notice of this society in the present section.

At the commencement of the New Connection, the general baptists at *Hinkley* and *Longford*† formed but one church. It was served by Messrs. W. Smith and George Hickling ; two acceptable and successful ministers : the latter especially acquired a considerable degree of popularity, both among his own friends, and in other branches of the connection. The cause had prospered so much under their care, that the members, which, in 1766, amounted only to fifty, had, in

* *Supra*, pp. 54, 55.

† *Supra*, p. 47, 48.

1772, increased to one hundred and eighty-four. At that time, the propriety of a friendly division became a subject of serious deliberation. The principal difficulty arose from the partiality of both parties for Mr. Hickling. But, as there were two or three judicious and pious members at Hinckley, who had begun to be useful in conducting meetings, it was at length settled, with mutual approbation, that Mr. Hickling should remain at Longford; and that Mr. Smith should remove to Hinckley, to take the oversight of the church in that neighbourhood. The separation was solemnly effected, Feb. 2d. 1773; when every member was left at liberty to join which party he pleased.

Seventy members remained, after this arrangement, to form the distinct church at *Hinckley*, which were scattered over a large tract of country; including Hinckley, Wolvey, Burbage, Burton, Brancote, Earl-Shilton, Righton, and Dunton. The cause continued to prosper; and, in a few months after the separation, twelve were added to the church by baptism. In 1774, the ministers extended their labours to Witheybrook, a village two miles beyond Wolvey; where Mr. Robert Compton, a worthy member of this society, licensed his house to receive them. The success was encouraging; and the door then opened has never yet been closed.

In 1778, they were providentially enabled to introduce the gospel into Thurlaston, a village six miles east of Hinckley. Mr. Edward Parkinson, having removed from Castle Donington, and settled at Thurlaston, became a member of the church at Hinckley. His brother, Thomas Parkinson, of Quorndon, was a deacon of Loughborough church. Mr. B. Pollard, a young

preacher in the latter society, was engaged to preach, on the Lord's-day, for the friends at Hinckley: and, being a stranger in those parts, Mr. T. Parkinson kindly undertook to accompany him. They called, to spend the Saturday evening, at his brother's, at Thurlaston. In the course of conversation, it was remarked, that the gospel had never been preached in that village in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. Mr. Thomas Parkinson immediately proposed, that Mr. Pollard should preach that evening, in his brother's house. The proposal was cheerfully accepted; and notice given to the neighbours. A number attended; and heard with seriousness and approbation. A desire to hear again was evidently excited. Mr. E. Parkinson, therefore, licensed his house: and the ministers from Hinckley, and other adjacent churches, cheerfully engaged to supply it. The cause took deep root: and, in a short time, several of the inhabitants of this dark place were baptized, and added to the church.

Thus, under the divine blessing on the zealous exertions of his servants, the truth gradually spread. Their plain, faithful, and unadorned discourses were delivered with energy, and attended with success. The peculiar and important doctrines of christianity were clearly stated, and constantly insisted on: and Christ, and him crucified, became the wisdom of God, and the power of God, to the salvation of many precious souls in the villages round Hinckley. But, it is painful to add, that, in the town itself, the prospect was less encouraging; and that, towards the close of this period, considerable trouble and disorder, in the internal concerns of the church, distressed the hearts of the friends of religion, and

prevented the progress of the truth. In 1785, the members amounted to ninety-one.

In the year 1770, there was an independent society at *Sutton Coldfield*, a town in Warwickshire, about ten miles north-east of Birmingham. Mr. Abraham Austin was a promising young member of this small church, and was highly esteemed by his brethren. In June that year, the pastor being absent, and the pulpit unprovided for, his friends prevailed on him to fill up the vacancy, by attempting to preach. This attempt gave great satisfaction to his auditors ; and he was afterwards frequently employed. In a short time, a dispute arose in the church on some point of doctrine, and a division ensued. Mr. Austin approving the opinion of the seceders, they formed a separate interest. They licensed a room in the town, which they fitted up for public worship. Here Mr. Austin preached, and many of the congregation among which he had previously laboured, followed him. The hearers increased rapidly, and the room soon became too small to accommodate them. This obliged them to look out for a more capacious place ; and they soon found a piece of ground, with an erection on it, that suited their purpose. This they purchased for eighty pounds ; and fitted up the building as a meeting-house. This, probably, took place about 1774.

Some time previous to this event, two of the members of the general baptist church at Longford, having occasion to pass through Sutton-Coldfield, enquired whether there were any dissenters in the town. They were directed to Mr. Austin ; and obtained an interview with him. They were highly pleased to discover, from his

conversation, that, on the most important doctrines, his sentiments coincided with their own. But, when the subject of believers' baptism was introduced, he acknowledged that it had never engaged his thoughts. The travellers requested him to turn his attention to the subject; and proceeded on their journey. On their return to Longford, they communicated to their friends the pleasure which they had enjoyed in their interview with these professors; and the good opinion which they entertained of their character and sentiments. This induced Mr. Hickling, their pastor, and several of his friends, to go over and spend a Lord's-day at Sutton. An increasing intimacy was thus cultivated; and the result was, that these people were encouraged to examine the scripture for themselves, and form their own judgments on its contents. Mr. Austin paid several visits to the general baptist churches, especially to Melbourn: his mind soon became convinced of the divine appointment of believers' baptism, and he was baptized at Melbourn. Many of his hearers having embraced the same sentiments, Mr. F. Smith, of Melbourn, went over to Sutton Coldfield, baptized sixteen of them, and formed them into a regular general baptist church. They called Mr. Austin to minister to them in holy things; but he was never ordained to the pastoral office over that society. Others soon joined them; so that, in 1776, their number amounted to forty-two. They then preached alternately at Sutton and Birmingham; and were, in general, lively and happy.

In June, 1775, Mr. Austin attended the association at Hinckley, and applied for admission into the New Connection. After having declared their "faith and fundamental doctrines," the

matter was referred to the churches, and the decision postponed to the following year; when they were unanimously received. Mr. Austin then laid the particulars of the purchase of the meeting-house before the association, and requested assistance in liquidating the debt.

For several years, the cause continued to flourish. The congregations were large, and additions frequent; and, to use their own language, repeated for three or four successive years, the church was "united, lively, and happy." In 1781, they opened a place, for public worship, at Bloxwich; where they preached once a fortnight, and were well attended with hearers. At some following associations, they complain of coldness and indifference to the things of God in too many of their members; and, in 1784, they say, "We have had some trouble, and expect more." Whether this trouble was connected with the following events, we are not informed: but, in 1785, it appears, that, finding themselves unable to raise a sufficient supply for the temporal wants of their minister, they applied to the association for advice and assistance. That meeting recommended it to Mr. Austin "to turn his mind to some way of business;" and a few of the churches expressed their willingness to lend assistance to the friends at Sutton. Things could not, however, be satisfactorily arranged. Mr. Austin left them, and settled in London; where, for more than thirty years, he honourably and usefully presided over the baptist church in Fetter-lane. At his departure, the church consisted of fifty-nine members, who were tolerably united.

Our information respecting the church at *Longford*, after its separation from Hinckley, is very

general. It consisted, in 1773, of one pastor, two deacons, and one hundred and twelve members. Soon afterwards, Mr. Samuel Catterns was chosen to the office of ruling elder ; and the number of deacons increased to four. For several years, the cause continued to prosper ; and Mr. Hickling's reputation to spread. In 1775, no fewer than thirty persons were added to the church by baptism. The number of hearers that crowded to their public services made a more commodious place of worship very desirable ; and means were adopted to obtain one. In 1777, they established preaching, every Lord's-day, at Coventry ; and, for a time, there appeared an encouraging prospect of success. But the removal of some persons who countenanced the attempt, and the subsequent confusion in the society at Longford, rendered this undertaking abortive. The following year, the church experienced no little trouble, from several of their members embracing the tenets of the calvinists and methodists ; and thirteen were excluded. A short interval of peace succeeded : but, in 1784, some irregularities in the conduct of Mr. Hickling led to a separation between him and the church. This unhappy event gave a check to the progress of the cause in that place ; from which it has never recovered. In 1785, the members amounted to one hundred and thirty-two, who say, " If we had a minister, there is great probability that good would be done ; but, if we have not one settled among us, we fear that the cause will dwindle away."

Soon after the separation from Hinckley, the ministers at Longford were led to extend their labours to *Harbury*,* a village in Warwickshire,

* The circumstances that led to the introduction of these

distant about twenty miles southward. Here, several, embracing the truth, joined Longford church ; and a meeting-house was erected. But the distance of situation rendering communion with the parent society difficult, they were formed, in 1775, into a distinct church, consisting of eighteen members. Mr. John Hill, one of their number, "who sometimes expounded among them," was elected ruling elder ; and they were favoured with the labours of their former pastor, Mr. Hickling ; who, for some time, visited them once a fortnight. But standing alone, and at a distance from any of their sister churches, they could not receive adequate support ; and the cause declined. In 1779, Mr. Hill attended the

ministers into Harbury were rather singular. S. Ashby, the young woman whom we have already mentioned as the first general baptist in the neighbourhood of Longford, (*see page 39*) paid a visit to a relation at Ladbroke, a village near Harbury. In the course of conversation, she brought forward some serious topics ; and was pained to observe that they excited disgust in her relative. After some time, he returned the visit ; but, unwilling to displease him, she avoided all allusion to religion.—Staying till the next day, he was awakened during the night, by the voice of his relative, who slept in an adjoining apartment, and seemed in earnest discourse. He soon discovered that she was talking in her sleep ; and curiosity led him to listen. His surprize may be easily conceived, when he heard her discussing the same important subjects in her sleep which had engaged their waking attention, in her previous visit to Ladbroke. Though then disgusted, he was now so struck with the energy of her manner, the force of her arguments, and the pertinency of the texts of scripture which she brought to support her doctrines, that he resolved on a serious inquiry, and determined to hear the preachers for himself. This he did : and his prejudices being removed, he embraced the truth, and became anxious that his neighbours also should hear the joyful sound. On his return to Ladbroke, he invited Mr. Hickling to come and preach in the neighbourhood. The invitation was accepted : Mr. Hickling repeated his visit ; and the result was, the formation of the temporary interest at Harbury. *J. D. MSS.*

association at Longford, as the representative of this church; when he reported, that "religion was in a low state." The cause continued to droop; till, before the year 1783, it became extinct: and the meeting-house was sold to the Methodists.

During the period of which we are treating, the church at *Nottingham* joined the New Connection. In the year 1773, William Fox, who had formerly been a member of Kirkby-Woodhouse church, settled at Little Hallam, and removed his communion to Kegworth church. He had made some attempts at preaching, and was allowed to possess abilities for the sacred work: but he was unsteady in his disposition, and not sufficiently circumspect in his conduct. Being more under the inspection of the ministers at Hallam, his character appeared to improve, and he was encouraged to preach: at first, only occasionally, but afterwards more regularly. After residing two years at Hallam, he removed to Nottingham. Here he licensed his dwelling-house; in which he commenced public worship. In a short time, a few of his hearers were affected with the truths which he preached; and, in May 1775, six persons were baptized, on a profession of faith in Christ.* Two others joining them from neighbouring churches, they were formed into a distinct society; which, with W. Fox and his wife, consisted of ten members. The cause

* The names of these first converts, who may be considered as the founders of the general baptist interest at Nottingham, were, Nathan Hurst, Jonathan Oldham, Joseph Fowler, Mary Fowler, Mary Shelton and Catharine Atkinson; and the two who joined them from other churches were William Taylor and Ann Freeman. *G. B. R. Vol. II. p. 50.*

assumed an encouraging aspect ; and, in the course of the next year, the members increased to thirty. William Fox was ordained pastor over this infant church, by Messrs. J. Grimley, F. Smith, and J. Tarratt. Mr. Fox was ordained in their usual place of worship—a garret in his own house. But, encouraged by the success of these weak attempts, they determined to build a more commodious meeting-house ; and actually purchased a piece of ground for that purpose.

But these bright prospects were soon overcast. The conduct of their minister became irregular and disgraceful. He was repeatedly seen in a state of intoxication : and, having been often admonished and reproved in vain, he was, at last, excluded from the church. The effects of this unhappy event were inexpressibly mischievous to the infant cause. Most of the hearers forsook their meetings : several of the members withdrew : the enemies of the truth took occasion to blaspheme : and the name of this apostate became, for many years afterwards, a term of reproach in the mouths of the profane, which they applied, with impious exultation, to all the professors of religion. Did ministers of the gospel reflect on the dreadful effects which their sins, and even their imprudencies, produce, it would excite in their minds a holy jealousy over their conduct, and make them earnest in prayer for grace to resist the first appearance of evil.

For several years after this awful stroke, the few friends who adhered to the cause in Nottingham, procured assistance from the neighbouring churches. The ministers from Melbourn, Donington, and Loughborough supplied alternately with John Hallam, one of their members, who appears to have preached with some degree of

acceptance for several years. But the interest had sunk so low, that the preachers often travelled twenty miles, and found scarcely twenty hearers. For a long time, they continued their exertions with laudable perseverance; but at length, seeing no fruit of their labours, they began to deliberate on the propriety of declining any further endeavours. On this occasion, Mr. Thurman encouraged them to proceed. "We have cast," said he, "our bread on the waters; we have sown the seed: who can tell but the harvest time is near, when we shall reap, if we faint not?" Animated by this exhortation, the ministers continued their visits. They soon had the satisfaction of seeing the cause in some degree revive; and several additions made to their number. The memory of Mr. Thurman is, to this day, dear to the friends at Nottingham, for this salutary advice; which has always been esteemed a principal cause, under the divine blessing, of the present existence of their church.

In the year 1779, they hired a large room in Jack-Knutter's-lane, for a place of worship. In this they preached to a few hearers, and were little known to their neighbours. But, about this time, a circumstance happened, by which they attracted the attention of the inhabitants of this populous town. A person was convicted, at the Nottingham assizes, of robbing the mail; and received sentence of death. While he lay under condemnation, several general baptist friends and their ministers frequently visited him; and their instructions and prayers appeared to be highly blest to his spiritual advantage. On the day of execution, great crowds collected from distant villages; and Messrs. Tarratt and Pollard attended the unhappy culprit on the scaffold. His

behaviour, at the awful moment, was composed and resigned. Mr. Pollard, in a very affecting manner, addressed the attentive multitude ; and the effect produced on many was strikingly visible. After the solemn scene was closed, the body was placed on the head of a cask in the street ; and Mr. Tarratt, standing on another, delivered an animated discourse, from Psal. lxxxvi. 12, 13. From this time, the general baptist preachers, especially Messrs. Pollard and Tarratt, were attended by numerous congregations ; and many hearing, believed, and were baptized.

In 1783, assisted by the liberality of sister churches, they purchased the Methodist meeting-house, for two hundred and fifty pounds. This new accommodation had a good effect in increasing the number of hearers : and, as Mr. Hallam had removed his residence to Leake, they felt strongly the necessity of a more regular ministry. Among the preachers who had visited them, was Mr. Robert Smith, of Loughborough, the son of Mr. F. Smith, of Melbourn, a young man of promising abilities. The friends at Nottingham highly approved his labours, and were desirous of obtaining him for their pastor. After surmounting many obstacles, arising chiefly from the erroneous ideas which had been entertained of the real state of things in the town and the church, they applied to the association in 1784. That meeting advised Mr. Smith to go to Nottingham, on probation, for one year. He, accordingly, removed in the following June. The affection which the people entertained for this young minister, made them earnest in prayer for the success of this experiment ; and the Lord was pleased to grant their requests. Before the close of the year, the congregation had considerably in-

creased; nine were added to the church by baptism; three received from other churches; and two were restored: the whole number of members, in 1785, being seventy-three. The pleasing success, which had so visibly crowned his endeavours, determined Mr. Smith to take his lot with this affectionate people: and, Sept. 11th. 1785, he was admitted a member of their church.

In 1782, a small church of general baptists at *Ashford* on the Peak, joined the New Connection. It consisted, then, of only ten members; but, in the following year, had increased to fifteen.—They were supplied by ministers from the midland and northern districts. Though these supplies were more regular and frequent than, from a consideration of the distance and other circumstances, could have been expected, yet they were found insufficient for the prosperity of the cause. But, as we have not been able to procure a detail of the particulars relating to this society, we refer to the next chapter: when we hope to be able to give a more satisfactory account of its rise and progress.*

SECT. 3.—*The Progress of the General Baptist Cause in the Northern District, during the first Fifteen Years after the Commencement of the New Connection.*

WHEN the New Connection was formed, there was but one society of general baptists in the

* Min. of Ass. of N. C. 1772—1785. Min. of Linc. Ass. G. B. R. Vol. I. p. 250. Vol. II. pp. 2—8, and 49—53. G. B. M. Vol. II. pp. 150—153: and Information kindly communicated by the respective churches.

northern district, the church at Birchcliff, under the care of Mr. Dan Taylor.* But these zealous christians were anxious to carry the glorious light of the gospel into the places which, on every side of them, lay in spiritual darkness. The labours of their minister to accomplish this noble object were almost incredible. To this he devoted all the energies of a mind naturally vigorous and enterprizing ; and of a constitution remarkably hardy and capable of fatigue. His people, in general, seconded his efforts ; and heartily co-operated with him, as far as circumstances permitted. The happy result of their united endeavours was, that, under the blessing of the great Head of the church, before the close of fifteen years, four regular general baptist churches were established, and several acceptable ministers called forth and usefully employed in the sacred work. Let us now take a brief survey of these societies, as they arose ; beginning with the parent stock.

The church at *Birchcliff*, sensible of the importance of more assistance in the great work of preaching the gospel, used all proper means to call forth more labourers into the field. So early as 1772, four young men met weekly for the exercise of their gifts : and, once a month, they had an interview with their pastor, for advice and instruction. Prayer meetings were opened, in various parts of the neighbourhood, and experience meetings were regularly maintained in the different districts of the church. The good effects of these measures were soon visible. In the next year, Richard Folds, a young member who

* *Supra*, p. 79.

had thus exercised his abilities, was encouraged to preach. Soon afterwards, Mr. John Taylor, the brother of the pastor, who had joined the society in the beginning of that year, was called to exercise before the church : when his friends, being satisfied with his fitness for the sacred employment, gave him permission, Dec. 26th. 1771, to preach as opportunity should offer. Not long after this, Jeremy Ingham, another of the members, was approved as a minister ; and, after preaching occasionally in this district for some time, was invited to serve the church at Maltby in Lincolnshire : where he laboured till his death. The cause also prospered : the meetings were well attended ; the members lively ; and the prospect encouraging.

This increase of ministers led to more extended labours. Soon after Mr. Taylor's settlement at Wadsworth, he had, by some means, succeeded in carrying the news of salvation to Shore ; a desolate and uncultivated village, about seven miles from Birchcliff. He had continued to traverse, with alacrity, the bogs and mountains, to preach occasionally in this neglected spot. Nor was his labour wholly in vain. He had, even there, some seals to his ministry. When other preachers were raised up to his assistance, they were enabled to visit it more regularly ; and the cause gained strength. In 1777, it was determined to erect a small meeting-house at Shore, which was opened, in the autumn, by Messrs. D. and J. Taylor. The ministers of the neighbouring churches supplied it as regularly as circumstances permitted : and the friends there continued to be considered as members of Birchcliff church, till after the close of the period now under review. Previous, also, to the erection of

the meeting-house at Shore, preaching had been established at Queenshead. In supporting the cause at that place, also, Mr. D. Taylor had laboured much: and, for some time, preached there one Lord's-day in the month; when his brother supplied his place at Birchcliff. These, and various other engagements, connected with the promotion of the general baptist interest, called Mr. Taylor frequently from his own friends; and obliged them to relinquish the profit and pleasure which they reaped from his ministerial labours, to attend the crude attempts of young preachers: but their wish for the prosperity of the cause in which their pastor was so much employed, induced them, in general, to make these sacrifices, not only without regret, but with sincere pleasure.*

Thus this church continued to promote the interests of religion, both in its own neighbourhood, and at distant places. Numbers were continually added; and harmony and love distinguished all their proceedings. But, in 1783, an event took place, which, for a time, had considerable effect on their peace. The friends at Halifax had then become a distinct church; and, being

* This was not universally the case. A few members of the church were dissatisfied. For several years, they contented themselves with occasional grumblings; and hoped that Mr. Taylor would, at length, grow weary and content himself at home.—When, however, they observed that things grew every year worse; and that there was no prospect that he would ever desist; but would, as long as he was able to travel, continue to carry the gospel and plant the general baptist interest in every place to which Providence gave him access, they broke out into open complaints. The peace of the church was, for a time, interrupted: but a few of the most discontented having withdrawn, harmony was restored: and this active man left at liberty to exert his whole strength in the pursuit of his favourite object.

situated in a populous and genteel town and neighbourhood, where there were other dissenting interests respectably supported, it was desirable that the general baptist cause, in that place, should enjoy every possible advantage. As Mr. D. Taylor was the most able and experienced minister, in these parts; and best qualified to defend and explain the distinguishing principles of his denomination, it was thought, that, for the general good of the cause, he should leave Birchcliff and settle at Halifax. This was, at first, warmly opposed by the friends at the former place: and much discussion and many meetings ensued. At last, it was agreed, that an experiment should be made and that the result should determine the dispute. The church at Birchcliff had, at that time, a respectable young man, who had, for several years, preached occasionally, with much acceptance. His name was John Sutcliffe. It was, therefore, settled, that Mr. D. Taylor should labour for six months chiefly at Halifax: and that Mr. Sutcliffe should preach at Birchcliff: and if, at the expiration of this time, it should appear, that the cause at the latter place had not suffered any material injury; and that, at the former, peculiar benefit had been received, then Mr. Taylor should settle at Halifax. This experiment commenced with the year 1783; and the result was laid before the association at Nottingham, in June following. After a candid and serious investigation of all the circumstances, that meeting gave it as its opinion, "that it would be more for the advantage of the cause of Christ for Brother Taylor to continue at Halifax." To this decision all the parties submitted: and the church at Birchcliff lost their founder and pastor. "This," to use their own

simple but expressive language, “was one of the greatest troubles we ever experienced. We did all that we could do, with a good conscience, to prevent it ; but all in vain.”

Soon after Mr. Taylor’s removal, the church called Mr. J. Sutcliffe to the pastoral office : and, though a few withdrew in consequence of these troubles, yet thirteen were added by baptism before the next association. The cause of Christ, notwithstanding this check, continued to advance ; harmony was restored to their proceedings ; and, in 1785, the number of members, after dismissing twenty-two to form a separate church at Burnley, was ninety-three : they were well attended with hearers ; and harmonious among themselves.

When the general baptists began to preach at *Queenshead*, there existed only one public-house, from the sign of which the place took its name ; and a few scattered cottages : there being no village on any side within two miles. It is situated about three miles north of Halifax, and eleven east of Birchcliff. There was only one dissenting meeting-house in a circuit of several miles ; which was two miles from *Queenshead*, and belonged to the independents. The few inhabitants were ignorant and rude ; and, it is highly probable, the ordinance of believers’ baptism had never been heard of by many of them.

Mr. D. Taylor had an acquaintance with a local preacher among the methodists, who dwelt within a mile of *Queenshead*. Being on a visit to this friend, he was requested to preach. Among the hearers was John Bairstow, who resided in the neighbourhood. This plain man was very much pleased with the discourse, and felt a desire to

hear again the same minister. He went to Birchcliff for this purpose; and was soon convinced of the truth of the doctrines held by the baptists. Early in 1772, he was baptized and received into fellowship.

This young convert, with the ardour usual in persons of that description, was frequently engaged in defending his principles and practice against his neighbours, especially the independents. Amongst others, he had frequent conversation, on these subjects, with Mr. Jonathan Scott, a respectable tradesman in the vicinity of Queenshead. But, finding himself unequal to the contest with him, he procured an interview between Mr. D. Taylor and Mr. Scott. This led to an intimacy, which soon ripened into friendship. Mr. Scott entered heartily into the religious views of his new acquaintance, and became desirous that the gospel might be regularly preached in his neighbourhood. Mr. J. Taylor, of Halifax, who had lately been called to the work of the ministry, and a few of his neighbours, who had also joined the Birchcliff church, and were well acquainted with Queenshead, united in the same wish. It was, therefore, agreed that an attempt should be made; and J. Taylor preached the first discourse, in J. Bairstow's house, about half a mile from Queenshead, Nov. 28th 1772, from the comprehensive aphorism of the apostle, "Other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* This first attempt was well attended: and, before the next Lord's-day, a more commodious place was hired, near the public-house, and fitted up for a meeting-house. From this time,

* 1 Cor. iii. 11.

constant worship was maintained : J. Taylor preaching three Lord's-days in each month ; and D. Taylor the fourth : when his brother supplied his place at Birchcliff.

Though many circumstances had a very discouraging effect, yet these good men persevered, and the Lord helped them. They struggled through the winter with many difficulties : but the meetings were well attended for the season ; and the truths which were preached appeared to make an impression on several of the hearers. In the following February, J. Scott and another person were publicly baptized. Mr. D. Taylor was the administrator : and delivered, on the occasion, a plain, faithful and affectionate discourse on believers' baptism ; in which he exhorted his hearers, in very pressing terms, to search the scriptures and judge for themselves. Many of them determined to take his advice : and, for several weeks, a peculiar activity prevailed throughout the neighbourhood. Those that had bibles, and could read, were busily employed in consulting them ; and those who had not these advantages, were eagerly listening to the researches of their more intelligent friends. This appeal to the scriptures had a happy effect.—Many were thus convinced that believers' baptism was of scriptural authority ; and, when they afterwards turned from sin to God, they were prepared to attend, without hesitation, to that sacred ordinance.

As the spring advanced, the friends of the cause began to look out for a more convenient place of meeting ; and purchased a piece of ground very near the house in which they then assembled. On Easter Monday, April 12th. 1773, a number of cheerful neighbours digged the ground, for the

foundation of a new meeting-house; and the workmen commenced the building. A collection was made in the neighbourhood, and twenty pounds obtained: a great effort, when the fewness and poverty of the inhabitants are considered. Mr. D. Taylor also having occasion, in the spring, to visit some of the midland and Lincolnshire churches, obtained for them sixty pounds; and the remainder of the money was borrowed. The whole expence was about one hundred and sixty pounds.

At the close of Aug. 1773, the number who had joined the general baptists at Halifax and Queens-head had increased to seventeen; who had all been baptized by Mr. D. Taylor, and were members of the church at Birchcliff. Many obvious reasons, however, made it desirable for all parties, that they should be formed into a distinct society. They were accordingly dismissed from the mother church; and constituted the second general baptist church in the northern district. Mr. J. Taylor was invited to be their pastor, and accepted the invitation. Preparations were, therefore, made for opening their new meeting-house, and ordaining their minister. Messrs. William Thompson, of Boston, J. Tarrant, of Kegworth, and D. Taylor, their spiritual father, were invited to assist them in these important solemnities. Sept. 29th. 1773, the meeting-house was opened: Mr. Tarrant read suitable portions of scripture, and prayed: Mr. Thompson expounded and applied Psal. cxxxii.; and Mr. D. Taylor preached, from 1 Kings ix. 3. On the following day, Mr. J. Taylor was solemnly ordained to the pastoral office: when Mr. D. Taylor delivered the introductory discourse, put the questions to the minister and people, offered the ordination

prayer, and gave the charge* to his brother, from 2 Tim. ii. 15. In the afternoon, Mr. Tarratt addressed the church from 1 Thess. v. 12, 13

Being thus organized, these few people were left to their own exertions, for the support and extension of the blessed cause which they had undertaken. The winter soon commencing, rendered their congregations thin, and checked their progress. But they still had some encouragement. Oct. 29th. three persons were baptized : and, Dec. 25th. seven others : so that, at the close of the first year, the church had increased to twenty-eight members. Some disadvantage was experienced, by their pastor's distance of abode, as he still resided at Halifax : but, Nov. 1774, he removed, with his family, to Queenshead. He laboured hard for the advancement of the cause ; and his labours were crowned with success.— Thirty were added to the church in the course of this year ; and the preaching of the gospel had been extended to various places several miles distant. They had, also, paid particular attention to Halifax : and had taken several steps to introduce the gospel into that town.

For several years, the cause appeared to flourish ; and numbers were, from time to time, baptized : so that, before the close of 1776, upwards of one hundred had been received into fellowship. But it then became too apparent, that several of these were very improper characters. Ignorance and inexperience, joined to a great zeal to increase their numbers, had caused these young professors to be too ready in admitting candidates : and the

* This charge was remarkable for its affection, solemnity and length : containing, as it was asserted by one who heard it, six hundred particulars.

same causes probably urged them, when they perceived this error, to proceed with too much precipitation in excluding offenders. For many succeeding years, exclusions were frequent, and additions few. This decline was much increased, by the disorderly conduct of one or two of their members; who had been called to the work of the ministry, but whose future conversation proved too plainly that they were destitute of that faith which purifies the heart. During this time, however, much was done by the ministers and people at Queenshead for the spread of the gospel. For several years, their pastor was nearly one half of the time employed, in helping other churches, and in preaching in places in which the cause had not been planted.

Regular preaching had been maintained at Halifax, almost from the first formation of the Queenshead church; and several had joined in fellowship from that neighbourhood. They continued to form one society, till 1782, when an amicable separation took place: and about thirty members were dismissed, to form a distinct society; which has since been known by the appellation of Halifax church.

After this division, fifty members remained in the society at Queenshead: and, though the wounds that had been given to religion, by the disorders of former years, were still bleeding, yet a few were successively added to their number: and, in 1785, the members amounted to fifty-two. They then describe the state of the church in these terms. “The congregation is full when the weather is moderate. Many of our friends are frequently confined at their homes by bodily afflictions and poverty: and many are too much taken up with the things of this world. Yet, glory

be to God, we hope that some are hearty in his cause and for his glory. We are saved by hope."

During this period, several ministers were raised up in this church ; who were afterwards useful in various parts of the connection. Among these, Jonathan Scott deserves particular notice ; who was, from the commencement of the cause in this neighbourhood, usefully and acceptably employed in labouring as an assistant preacher. In 1785, he removed to serve the church at Gamston and Retford. Mr. Joseph Ellis, also, now pastor at Halifax, was a member at Queenshead, and called to the ministry in 1784.

Mr. John Taylor was the first general baptist in *Halifax* ; but, soon after his uniting himself with that denomination, several of his neighbours and acquaintances followed his example. So early as 1772, Mr. D. Taylor had frequent opportunities of preaching in private houses in that town. Though there appeared but little encouragement, yet the services were occasionally continued ; and, in May 1775, it was resolved to make a more regular attempt to raise an interest. Overtures were made to the independents, who were then building a new meeting-house, to purchase their old one ; but they declined treating with people of such different sentiments. A chamber was, therefore, hired, at the bottom of Jail-lane, and regular preaching was commenced. The ministers from Birchcliff and Queenshead attended in rotation, and considerable efforts were made : but the success was small. Few of the inhabitants of the town attended, except when Mr. D. Taylor preached : and the congregation, which was very small, was then com-

posed of persons from the suburbs and adjacent villages, with a few who usually attended from the vicinity of Queenshead.

It was thought, that greater countenance might be obtained, if they had a more respectable place of meeting : and Messrs. D. Taylor, Jonathan Scott, and the friends at Halifax, made a considerable effort to accomplish this desirable object. In the beginning of 1777, a piece of ground was purchased at Haley Hill, half a mile from the town, and a neat chapel was erected ; which was opened, Sept. 3d 1777, by Messrs. D. and J. Taylor. The latter delivered a discourse from Zech. vi 12, 13 ; and the former from Hag. ii. 9. The friends from Birchcliff and Queenshead attended on this occasion, and enjoyed much satisfaction : but even this interesting event did not induce many of the inhabitants of the town to witness the solemnity. The prospect of great success still continued very doubtful. The gloom was increased by the spirit of partiality and prejudice with respect to particular ministers, which manifested itself too plainly both at Queenshead and Halifax ; and, for several years, grieved the hearts, and weakened the hands, of the sincere friends of the Redeemer. A few, however, were added, during this discouraging season, who have been ornaments to their profession.

In 1780, Mr. J. Bates, who had been for some time a member of the church at Queenshead, began to preach : and his labours being well approved by the friends at Halifax, he removed to Haley Hill, opened a school in the meeting-house, and became their regular minister. The prospect appeared to brighten, and sanguine hopes were entertained, that success might yet crown the attempt. But this gleam was transient. Mr.

Bates maintained certain views on some divine subjects, which were thought to be inconsistent with the principles of the general baptists. This produced a coolness between him and his hearers; which in less than a year after his first settlement, issued in a separation. After his secession, the pulpit was chiefly supplied by the preachers from Queenshead, with the occasional assistance of Mr. D. Taylor.

Hitherto, the friends at Halifax had continued members of the church at Queenshead: but, in 1782, it was thought advisable to separate. This was now effected by mutual consent; and, every one being left at full liberty to join which society he pleased, about thirty united to form the church at Halifax.

In the following year, after much investigation and difficulty, as we have already seen,* it was resolved, that, for the greater advantage of the general baptist cause, Mr. D. Taylor should remove from Birchcliff to Halifax. This he did: and, Oct. 8th. 1783, was solemnly set apart to the pastoral office over this society: when William Thompson addressed the minister and Mr. Tarrott the people.† This was a high day for this small church. Every heart felt satisfaction, and every countenance beamed with delight. Earnest and cordial thanks were offered by many, for the happy prospect of the future prosperity of this hitherto languishing interest.

For a short space, these hopes appeared likely to be realized. Mr. Taylor's abilities and character were highly esteemed in the neighbour-

* Supra, pp. 180, 181.

† The former from Rev. ii. 10, last clause: and the latter from 1 Thess. v. 12—15.

hood—the congregation increased in number and respectability—peace and confidence were restored to the church—several were added to it—and many appeared to be ready to come forward and declare themselves on the Lord's side. But an unexpected cloud soon overspread the horizon. The ancient society of general baptists, which assembled in Church-lane, Whitechapel, wishing for an assistant to their aged pastor, Mr. John Brittain, turned their eyes to Mr. D. Taylor, as a person qualified to serve them. They applied, therefore, to the church at Halifax, and requested them to resign him. Most of the Yorkshire friends were thunderstruck at the proposal, and felt disposed to reject it without examination: and some of the principal members at Halifax were so disgusted at the attempt, that they refused to take any part in the subsequent discussions. The subject was, however, largely and frequently discussed: and the advocates for Mr. Taylor's continuance at Haley-Hill had the mortification to find their own weapons turned against themselves. Every argument drawn from the comparative importance of the two places, the opportunity for being useful, or the general advantage of the common cause, which had been advanced to prove the propriety of the removal of this minister from Birchcliff to Halifax, was now urged with increased effect in favour of his leaving Halifax for London. Some of the Yorkshire friends perceived this; and, with a laudable consistency, seconded the claims of London: but many held out; and the matter was referred to the Boston association, in 1785. That assembly, after a very laborious and serious investigation of the question, declared in favour of Mr. Taylor's removal to London. This decision was final.—

Mr. Taylor and his family set out for London, in the middle of July, 1785 : leaving the church at Halifax, which then consisted of fifty-six members, again destitute of a pastor.* Mr J. Scott and his family removed, at the same time, from the neighbourhood of Queenshead to Retford in Nottinghamshire.

* The removals of Mr D. Taylor, from Birchcliff to Halifax, and afterwards to London, were, we apprehend, the first instances of a minister leaving the church over which he had been ordained pastor, that occurred in the New Connection. Whether this practice, which has become not uncommon, be not prejudicial to the interests of religion, is a question which demands the conscientious attention of all parties concerned. These first precedents, however, were fully investigated : and it may, perhaps, be useful to insert the record of the deliberations, at the Boston association, respecting the removal to London. This will not only shew the pains taken to arrive at a proper conclusion on that occasion ; but may also suggest some useful hints to those who may have to determine in similar cases.

" It was then agreed to discuss the subject of brother D. Taylor's removal to London, in the following manner 1. To throw the matter into a systematic form, by proposing certain questions. 2. To read the papers from London and Halifax carefully over, before the discussion of these questions 3. To receive an account of what has been done, in the three branches of the connection, respecting this removal. 4. To contrast London with Halifax ; and inquire which is of most importance. 5. To inquire, in which place and round it, there are the most apparent opportunities of doing good. 6. To inquire, whether there are better instruments to be had for Halifax or London, as fitted for the place. 7. To inquire which place, London or Halifax, can more easily obtain a suitable minister. 8. To inquire, if both places be without a suitable minister, which ought to be supplied. 9. After the above questions had been discussed, in order that every thing might be done or said in favour of Halifax, the cases from Halifax church were deliberately read over, and some questions having been asked, and observations made, the final query was solemnly put :—Does it appear, on the whole, likely to be for the glory of God and the good of mankind, that brother D. Taylor remove to London ?—Answer. Yes, 17. Neuter, 8." *Min. of Ass. 1785.* Two occasional questions were introduced in the discussion, which, as not bearing on the precise subject, are omitted.

The church at *Burnley*, which was formed into a distinct society at the close of the period now under review, demands a brief notice. The general baptists at Birchcliff, in their zeal to spread the gospel, had pushed their attempts seven miles beyond Shore, to Worsthorn, a village about two miles from Burnley, a small market town in Lancashire, twenty-one miles north west of Halifax. At Worsthorn they began to preach, in the open air, in the summer of 1776. There was, at first, a little confusion among the hearers : but it was rather jocular than spiteful ; and subsided, after they had preached a few times. An inhabitant of the place at length opened his door to receive the ministers ; and, for some time, they preached regularly in his house : but they afterwards removed to an apartment in a neighbouring village. The encouragement was never very flattering : for, though the hearers were as numerous as could reasonably be expected, yet not many came forwards to espouse the cause.— Several, however, appeared serious : and a few joined the church at Birchcliff. Mr. Richard Folds, who had preached occasionally under the sanction of that church, removed his residence to Worsthorn, and became the constant minister in that vicinity.

About 1780, it was determined to remove the place of worship from Worsthorn to Burnley. A house was accordingly hired in the town for the purpose : and Mr. Folds removed with his family to occupy it. Here the cause was supported for several years : and, though the increase was slow, it was regular. In the beginning of 1780, it was determined, that the friends at Burnley should form a separate society. Twenty-two of the members of Birchcliff, who lived in that neigh-

bourhood, were, therefore, regularly dismissed : and, uniting to support the interest of the Redeemer, invited Mr Folds to take the oversight of them. This invitation he accepted : and was ordained, Mar. 29th, by Messrs. D. and J. Taylor, and J. Sutcliffe. Four candidates had been baptized, by Mr. D. Taylor,* on the day previous to the ordination : so that the number of members then amounted to twenty-six.

SECT. 4.—*The History of the General Baptist Churches in Lincolnshire, during the first Fifteen Years after the Commencement of the New Connection.*

THE only church in Lincolnshire, which permanently united in forming the New Connection, was the society at *Boston*, under the care of Mr. W. Thompson. We left it, in 1770, increasing in numbers and improving in order.† The worthy pastor, and a few of the leading members, persevered in their endeavours to promote the cause of the Redeemer : and their efforts were not without success. Additions were frequently made to the church ; and the hearers continued

* Among the candidates, was Mr. Edmund Whitaker, of whom we shall have occasion to speak in another place. Baptism, by immersion, was a new sight to the inhabitants of Burnley ; and attracted numbers of disorderly spectators. It was administered near the bridge, in the rivulet, that runs through the town. When the minister and candidates were in the water, the mob pushed down a part of the battlements of the bridge into the stream, very near them. Happily, no mischief ensued. The young professors shewed some symptoms of fright ; but the administrator stood unmoved.

† Supra p. 132.

to increase. The labours of Mr. William Veall, a promising young minister whom it had pleased God to raise up among them, contributed not a little to this success. Having devoted himself to the Lord by baptism, in the sixteenth year of his age, this pious youth walked steadily forwards in the ways of religion ; and, in his twentieth year, was called by the church to preach in public. Being a sincere lover of the Saviour, his delight was to proclaim a free and full salvation to perishing sinners. But his usefulness was short. He was called to the church above, Nov. 12th, 1771, before he had completed his twenty-first year.

Notwithstanding this affecting check, the cause regularly advanced. In 1777, the meeting-house was enlarged, at an expence of upwards of two hundred and seventy pounds. To raise this money, a subscription was set on foot among the friends ; which received great encouragement from Robert Barlow, esq. who, though only a hearer, generously contributed fifty pounds. By these means, nearly two hundred pounds were raised, and application was made to the Connection for assistance. But, after several years' solicitation, a debt of upwards of fifty pounds remained ; which operated very unfavourably on the prosperity of the cause. To remove this impediment, their generous patron, Mr. Barlow, again stepped forwards ; and, by discharging the whole sum, freed the church from incumbrance. For this act of munificence, the church. Sept. 27th, 1780, voted him a letter of thanks.

Thus set at liberty, the cause proceeded with more rapidity. Their enlarged place of worship was soon filled with attentive hearers : and, though they complained, from year to year, that

those, who as they had reason to believe were really converted, delayed to join the church, yet, during the fifteen years now under review, eighty-five persons had been baptized on a profession of faith ; besides various others, who had been received by recommendation from sister churches. But such had been the ravages of death,* that, in 1785, the members amounted only to eighty. At that time, they had nine candidates waiting for baptism ; were united and happy ; and well attended with hearers.

Maltby is a village on the east of Lincolnshire, about twenty-five miles north of Boston. At this place, there existed an ancient general baptist society, which had probably been connected with the churches in the South Marsh ; and greatly reduced in the general decline of the cause. In 1773, fifteen of the members of this church, being dissatisfied with the old Connection, withdrew from its communion, and established a separate interest. Agreeing in their views of the truths of christianity with the New Connection, they were cordially admitted into that union, and promised ministerial assistance. They were visited occasionally by the preachers, and several converts soon joined their society. In 1775, Mr. Jeremiah Ingham, a young man who had been called to the ministry by the Birchcliff

* On the margin of the list of the names of the eighty-three members, who, Aug. 5th, 1738, subscribed the invitation of Mr. Goode to the pastoral office, which is preserved in the church book, Mr. Thompson has made this memorandum. "N.B. This 30th. of July 1781, of the number of members above written, I find now only four or five living. In the space of forty-three years, most of them are dead Awful thought ! Let me improve it."

church, settled with them as a preacher; and, after some time of probation, was ordained to the pastoral office over them.

Mr. Ingham's labours were blest with great success: and, in the following year, twenty-three were baptized. For a few years, this prosperity continued; but, in 1782, we find them complaining, that no additions were made to their numbers—that their members were slack in attending public worship—and that religion was in a low state. A pleasing revival, however, took place in the succeeding year: as they had then commenced preaching at Alsford, a market town about four miles to the south of Maltby; and at Theddlethorpe, at nearly the same distance, to the north. The attendance at all the places was encouraging; but especially so at Maltby. For some time, all these meetings were maintained with spirit and regularity; and the cause visibly gained ground: but Mr. Ingham's declining health obliged him, in 1785, to relinquish the attempt at Theddlethorpe. At that time, this church consisted of seventy-five members; their places of worship were well attended; and the society peaceable.

Mr. Henry Poole, who attended at the formation of the New Connection as the minister of Fleet church,* did not long continue to serve that congregation. His strain of preaching was considered as too methodistical, and a separation took place. But, as he had gained some partizans at Sutton-Garnsgate, a place a few miles from Fleet, he removed thither, and founded a new interest; which, from a village in its immediate

* Supra p. 133.

vicinity, was denominated *Long-Sutton church*. In 1773, this society was admitted into the New Connection. It then, and for several following years, consisted of only seventeen members. Yet Mr. Poole continued to preach with great fervour; and at length saw some fruit of his labours. He was regularly called and ordained to the pastoral office, over this small church; and a meeting-house was erected, at an expence of upwards of two hundred pounds: part of which was raised by subscription, and part collected among the churches of the New Connection.

This meeting-house was completed in 1776; and, for a time, was well filled. In 1778, the cause revived; and sixteen were baptized; which raised the number of members to thirty-four. But it soon began to droop: and, in 1785, the number was reduced to twenty-nine; and religion, it was feared, “was not on the advance.”

It was also during this period, that the ancient society of general baptists at *Killingholme*, joined the New Connection. Killingholme is a village situated on the south side of the Humber, in the north east corner of Lincolnshire, about nine miles south east of Barton. In this neighbourhood, a general baptist church had existed for more than a century. But its records being very imperfect, only a general account of its transactions can now be obtained.

In 1686, it was in a flourishing state, under the pastoral care of Mr. Thomas Sergeant; who appears to have been a very respectable and useful minister, and a person of considerable influence among his brethren in those parts.* The church

* In 1702, Mr. Sergeant accompanied Mr. Hooke to the

then consisted of seventy or eighty members, who were scattered in ten or twelve villages ; and maintained regular meetings at Elsham, Melton Ross, Keelby, Killingholm, and Winterton. Mr. Sergeant continued to preside over this prosperous interest till the spring of 1705, when he was probably removed by death. He was succeeded in the pastoral office by Mr. James Wood, who was ordained, by Mr. Joseph Hooke, Aug. 15th. 1705.

For several years, Mr. Wood laboured successfully among this people ; but the time of his decease is not known. The last time he attended the Lincolnshire Association was March, 1712. It is probable, that Mr. Thomas Ulliyott, who, for some years, acted as the colleague of Mr. J. Hooke, in the messenger's office, was either co-pastor with Mr. J. Wood or his successor, or perhaps both. When Mr. Ulliyott died is also uncertain ; but, in 1720, Mr. Thomas Wakeham appears to have been the pastor of this society. Under him the cause declined : for, to a meeting for discipline, in 1737, at which William Johnson, the messenger, presided, there are only four signatures, besides the pastor's. The members, therefore, were probably few. Mr. Wakeham died Feb. 14th. 1747. He was a pious minister ; and evinced his attachment to the cause of his Redeemer, by making a donation of a piece of land for a meeting-house and burying-ground ; which the church still possesses. About the same time, Mr. Stapp, a member of this congregation,

General Association in London, as the representatives of the Lincolnshire churches ; and, on various other occasions, he appears to have taken a leading part in the transactions of the Lincolnshire general baptists.

bequeathed five acres of land to the church for the support of the minister.

Mr. William Soulden, probably, succeeded Mr. Wakeham as pastor, in 1748; when the number of members was about fifty. This was a time of deep declension; several persons were excluded for seeking to such as pretended to have familiar spirits, for drunkenness, and for other disorders: and the cause rapidly declined. Mr. Soulden lived till 1768. After his decease, Mr. John Hannath, a respectable member of this society, who had begun to preach, with considerable acceptance, probably so early as 1755, undertook the whole work of the ministry. But the cause had then sunk so low, that, in 1771, there were only eighteen nominal members, vital religion was very low, and discipline much neglected. Such was the deplorable account which Mr. Hannath gave to the Lincolnshire Association.

But, from this time, there seems to have been a degree of improvement. Mr. Hannath was unanimously chosen to the pastoral office, Oct. 3d. 1773, and ordained by Messrs. D. Taylor and William Thompson. As he coincided in sentiment with these ministers, he forsook the Lincolnshire Association; and, in 1775, attended the annual meeting of the New Connection, which was held that year at Boston. Having given an account of his experience and opinions, which was unanimously approved, he was admitted a member of that association. His people also after making regular application, was, the following year, placed on their list of churches. The cause continued to advance, though very slowly: and, in 1785, the number of members was twenty-eight, who were unanimous and friendly.

In 1776, Killingholm fields were inclosed:

when the ground allotted to the church in lieu of the right of commonage was unjustly claimed by a neighbour. Mr. Hannath recovered it by a process at law; and liberally fenced it in, at his own expence.

During this period, there was a general baptist church at *Yarmouth*, in Norfolk, over which Mr. Benjamin Worship was ordained pastor, Jan. 9th 1775, by Messrs. D. Taylor and W. Thompson. In the year following, it was received into the New Connection. It then consisted of nearly fifty members; and the prospect was encouraging. We hear no more of it till 1782, when the members were reduced to twenty, and religion was low. It seems to have languished for some years beyond the close of this period, and then to have expired.*

SECT. 5.—*The History of the General Baptist Societies in the Southern District, during the first Fifteen Years after the Formation of the New Connection.*

THE society which assembled in *Church-lane, Whitechapel*, was, as we have already seen,† a member of the New Connection, at its first formation. But, whether from the distance of the

* In 1780, the church at *Kirton* in *Lindsay* joined the New Connection. It is an ancient church; but as we have not been able to obtain any particulars of its previous history, we refer the account of it, as well as of the churches at *Gosberton*, and *Wisbeach*, which, at the close of this period, made overtures for a similar union, to the next chapter.

† Supra p. 91.

places at which the annual associations were held, or for some other unassigned cause, the representatives of this church seldom appeared at those meetings. There is not, however, the slightest reason to suspect that want of zeal for the great doctrines which distinguished that connection induced their absence. Their zealous pastor gloried in the title of a free-grace general baptist; and it is evident, from their subsequent conduct, that his people heartily coincided in his views of divine truth.

During the former part of this period, the cause in Church-lane continued to flourish. Mr. Brittain's labours were well attended and successful: additions were frequent; and the zeal of many abounded. In 1775, Mr. Rowcliff, who had been called to the ministry by this society, was dismissed to the Park church, and became its pastor: and some others were, about the same time, called to preach the gospel. Several checks, indeed, occurred, amidst these encouragements: and the conduct of some of the members gave occasion of trouble, and called for the exercise of discipline: yet, upon the whole, the interest of religion advanced. But, towards the close of this period, the scene changed. Mr. Brittain's vigour began to abate; and the effects of advancing years rendered him less useful and acceptable as a preacher than he had formerly been. The congregations became thin; few came forwards to join the church; and the cause rapidly declined. In 1784, the number of members, which, at the commencement of the New Connection, were stated at three hundred, had decreased to one hundred and fifty: and the indifference and irregularity of many of these gave

too much cause for anxiety and alarm to those who really sought the prosperity of Zion.*

Among those who perceived and mourned over this declension, the venerable pastor, now in his seventy-fourth year, was peculiarly affected.—With a disinterestedness and zeal for the cause that deserve to be recorded, Jan. 23d. 1784, he earnestly exhorted the church to seek for a proper person who might, after due probation, be engaged to minister the word to them; as an assistant to him, during his life, and to whom they might, at his death, look forwards as his successor. At the same time, he urged them to exert themselves to provide a decent support for such an assistant; and set them a laudable example, by offering to relinquish a considerable part of the emoluments, which he received from them as their elder, in favour of any minister whom they might choose. These recommendations were taken into consideration at a series

* Notwithstanding this decline in numbers, the members of this society continued to give evidence of their zeal for the promotion of the general baptist cause, by their liberal exertions, in cases of a pecuniary nature. For, though it does not appear, that many rich men were connected with them; yet when application was made to them for assistance in building the meeting-house at Leicester, in the winter of 1783, more than one hundred and ten pounds were easily collected. And in the year following, twenty-three pounds, were soon raised by a private subscription among themselves, for white-washing and painting, their own meeting-house.—At this time, the church was blessed with several valuable and active members: among whom were Mr. William Shenston, who, for more than twenty years, filled the office of deacon, with honour to himself and advantage to the society; and Mr. W. Burgess, who, soon after was called to the ministry. These two, together with Messrs. Burston, Smithers, and Paxton, were ordained to the deacon's office, Sept. 25th. 1785. Messrs. B. Lewis, J. Henry, J. Bradshaw, &c. were also very active and useful.

of special church-meetings ; and, after some alterations and explanations, the propositions of their pastor were gratefully accepted by the church.*

The first step which this society took, in order to accomplish their object, was to address letters to three leading ministers in the new connection, Messrs. D. Taylor, W. Thompson, and G. Birley, to request their assistance in looking out for a minister. Then, sensible of the importance of

* In order that the deliberations on this subject might be more free and unrestrained, Mr. Brittain sent his propositions, in a letter, to the church-meeting ; declining to attend in person : and the church replied, in the same manner. The concluding sentiments of these communications breathe such a spirit of piety and christian affection, that we believe we shall need no apology for recording them. After recommending to his people the necessity of looking out for an assistant, and stating his readiness to co-operate in the important work, the aged pastor thus concludes : "That God may direct you in your application — invitation — judgment — and determination — that your souls may be built up and edified — thousands converted — the Redeemer exalted — the Eternal Three glorified — my grey hairs brought to the grave in peace — and you, the church, comfortable and affectionately united in love — is and shall be the hearty prayer of your loving brother, affectionate elder, and willing servant, in the cause of our common Lord and Saviour,

JOHN BRITTAINE."

In allusion to these affectionate prayers, the church replied. "Be assured, dear Sir, that your good wishes for our prosperity, unity, and love, as a church, and our spiritual improvement, as individuals, are not without their influence on our minds. In return we embrace, with pleasure, this seasonable opportunity of testifying our sincere regard for your person ; and wish you much of the divine presence and power with your soul :—and that you may be yet owned for usefulness in the church—enjoy a sweet serenity in your own soul—and, when your heavenly Master has no more work for you in his vineyard below, be received into the paradise of God, with a—' Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord'—is the earnest, and constant prayer of the church under your pastoral care."

the business in which they were engaging, they set apart the Lord's-day-evening weekly, for prayer to the Almighty for his direction and blessing; and observed April 5th as a day of solemn fasting and humiliation, for the decay of religion in the world, but particularly in their own church. They next applied to the annual association at Kirton in Lincolnshire; and, laying their state and wishes before that meeting, requested advice in procuring an assistant for their aged pastor. The answer they received was discouraging. "It is thought," said the Association, "to be a matter of great moment, that our friends in London have an assistant minister; but we cannot, at present, find a person that can be spared from among us, who seems to suit them."

Cold as this reply was, the introduction of the business, on this occasion, had important consequences. The representatives were deeply convinced, that it was highly necessary for the advantage of the general baptist cause at large, that an able minister should be stationed at London: and though, as a body, they declined naming any person as suitable; yet, as individuals, they freely declared their persuasion, that Mr. Dan Taylor was the only minister in the connection qualified for the important post. Some ventured further, and asserted, that his late removal from Birchcliff to Halifax had opened the way for a second change from Halifax to London. These discourses reached the ears of Mr. Brittain; and he eagerly embraced the idea. July 4th, he informed the church, that Mr. Dan Taylor might, probably, for the general advantage, be permitted to come to London. It was immediately resolved, that proper methods should

be adopted to procure him. Letters were addressed to the different conferences, and a very delicate and well-written epistle was sent to the church at Halifax. Mr. Taylor had occasion, after the association, to visit London ; and preached several times for this congregation. They were so well satisfied with his character and abilities, that they agreed that his disapproving of the practice of imposition of hands after baptism, though the custom of their church, should be no obstacle to their reception of him ; as he had no objection to another person's performing it.

Several circumstances occurring, which encouraged their hopes of ultimate success, they proceeded zealously to open subscriptions, and make arrangements for the support of their wished-for minister. Their aged pastor, also, in order to facilitate the business, enlarged his proposals of accommodating the church in pecuniary matters : and further suggested, that, considering the station which Mr. Taylor had so long and so honourably filled in the church, it would be more respectful to drop the idea of an assistant preacher, and endeavour to obtain him as joint pastor with himself : an arrangement with which he expressed his hearty concurrence.

With these preparations, Messrs. Paxton and Burgess were sent to the annual Association at Boston, in June 1785 ; to represent the church, and urge their request. At that meeting, as we have already seen,* the decision was favourable to their wishes. Mr. Taylor arrived, with his family, in London, July 29th ; was admitted into the church Aug. 18 : and called to the pastoral

* Supra p. 192.

office, Aug. 22. He was publicly set apart, as joint pastor with Mr. Brittain, Sept. 21; when his old friend, Mr. Thompson of Boston, delivered the charge; and Mr. Samuel Deacon, of Barton Fabis, addressed the church.

Thus was a business, which had for more than a year occupied the attention of the entire connection, brought to an honourable issue. The whole was conducted in a manner that does credit to all the parties concerned. This church acted throughout with candour, unanimity and zeal: and it must have yielded them both satisfaction and support to reflect, that all the steps which they took in this affair were accompanied by the full concurrence, the earnest wishes, and frequent and fervent prayers of their venerable and beloved pastor. The members of the church at Halifax, also evinced a truly christian spirit, in resigning, for the benefit of the connection at large, a minister, who was the object of their highest esteem and warmest affection.* While Mr. Taylor himself appears to have taken little part in the discussions which he occasioned; but resigned himself to be disposed of in any way which was thought most likely to promote the

* The letter of dismission which the church at Halifax gave to Mr. Taylor, addressed to the church in London, commences thus:—"Beloved Brethren,—As it is thought, by the Association of ministers and others, that it will be more for the glory of God and the good of men in general, that our pastor be settled with you in London, although to part with such a valuable and worthy minister, has, in all probability, been the greatest affliction we expect to meet with on this side of the grave; yet, as the great Governor of the universe has a just right to dispose of his servants as he sees best, we, in compliance therewith, humbly acquiesce with the divine providence, and dismiss him to you," &c.

good of the cause to which he had devoted himself and all his powers.

Our information respecting the church which now assembles in *Great Suffolk-street* is, during the present period, very limited. In 1770, it was under the pastoral care of Mr. William Summers, and met in Duke-street. Its pastor assisted at the formation of the New Connection ;* but no representatives from it attended any of the annual Associations previous to 1785.

When Mr. Summers undertook the oversight of this society, there was a debt of more than five hundred pounds on the meeting-house. The cause reviving, in some degree, under him, the friends exerted themselves to remove this burthen ; and, in seven years, paid off more than three hundred pounds. Finding themselves incapable of liquidating the remainder, they sent forth Mr. Summers, with a Case, and Confession of Faith, to go, as they express it, “wheresoever the Lord should be pleased to call him ; in hopes that he would, through the divine goodness, be recommended, either in public or private, to such as should be able and willing to relieve their present distress.” This attempt probably succeeded in obtaining the sum required : as we hear no more of any debt on the meeting-house.

For some time previous to this, Mr. Summers, had leaned too much to the system of the Calvinists : and many thought, that the creed which he drew up for the purpose of collecting, was hardly sound in the principles of the general baptists. But afterwards he acted more openly. He affected to associate with the particular bap-

* Supra pp. 92—96.

tists, and availed himself of their assistance in the ordination of deacons, without soliciting the presence of any of the ministers of his own persuasion. His public labours were formed on the same principles ; and he seemed determined to change the faith of the church. His attempts were resisted; and a separation ensued. He hired a meeting-house in the neighbourhood ; and was followed by many of the members, and the greater part of the hearers. Here he preached for three or four years ; till his partizans forsook him, and the cause expired.

The few members who remained at Duke-street took proper measures to preserve the cause.—They applied to their old friends in Church-lane, and were kindly assisted. After having received occasional supplies for two years, Mr. Rowcliff was dismissed from that society, in 1775, and became their pastor. He presided over this church till long after the close of this period ; but the cause appears to have continued low, and the prospect discouraging.

We know very little respecting the other societies, in the southern district of the Connection. It appears that, in 1772, that they held an Association at Bessell's-green ;* but we have no traces of any future meetings of this nature. In 1772, and the following year, Mr. Stanger, of Bessell's Green and a colleague, attended the northern Associations, as the representatives of the southern churches. It is probable that these

* The Circular Letter for 1772 is dated from "The Annual Meeting in two Parties or Divisions, viz. at Loughborough, on the 3rd and 4th, and at Bessell's Green, on the 10th and 11th days of June."

societies soon began to waver in their attachment to the doctrines on which the New Connection was founded : for, among the Minutes of the Association, at Melbourn, in 1773, we find the following. “The nature of the connection between the northern and southern churches was inquired into: and as there is not a full satisfaction among us concerning two of the ministers in the south, we appoint brother D. Taylor to write to them to know their present sentiments.” What the issue of this correspondence was, we are not informed : probably the suspected ministers declined to give any account of their sentiments.

In 1774, it was agreed, by the Association at Wadsworth, that there should be a general assembly of the northern and southern churches held at Hinckley, in 1775 ; but not one minister or representative from the southern branch attended that meeting. Yet the northern Association did not relinquish their attempt ; but, in 1778, directed Mr. Stanger, who was occasionally present at St. Ive’s, to inquire into the reasons why the southern churches neglected to associate annually, and to report to the next Association. Mr. Stanger made this report by letter ; and the result was very discouraging. As a last resource, Mr. D. Taylor was desired to write an exhortatory letter to Mr. Stanger, his church, and the rest of the southern brethren. This, doubtless, was done ; and, probably, without producing any good effect : as, from this time, all communication between the two branches of the connection appears to have ceased.

SECT. 6.—*A brief Survey of the Proceedings of the New Connection, as a Body, during the First Fifteen Years after its Formation.*

THE first object that occupied the attention of the Connection, was the adoption of proper rules for conducting its annual meetings. With this view, the ministers of the midland churches, and Mr. D. Taylor held a Conference, at Hugglescote, July 20th. 1773; and drew up a set of regulations, which they agreed to recommend to the pastors and churches. They were accordingly sent to each society, with a request that they would consider them; and enlarge, correct, or alter them, as might appear necessary, previous to the next Association. These rules regarded—the questions to be considered—the mode of presenting them—the order and manner of discussion—the power of the officers—and the persons entitled to act as members of the Association.* They were laid before the Association, at Wadsworth, in 1774: when it was agreed that they should be inserted in the Minutes, and acted upon in future Associations.

The method of admitting persons into the Connection, naturally became an early subject of deliberation. At the commencement of this union, as we have already seen, it was required

* On the last subject, they recommended “that, as serious inconveniences had arisen, from admitting persons into the Association who were not ministers or elders, the churches should satisfy themselves with those, and only those, having a place: unless when a church had no such officers, and then they might choose two brethren, whom the Association would readily admit.” It is evident, from this language, that, at this time, the Association was a synod of officers, not an assembly of representatives.

that every one who was admitted should subscribe the six articles which were then adopted.* But, in the Association, at Hinckley, in 1775, it was the opinion of a decided majority, “that subscription to a creed was not needful; but, that it was sufficient if a person who wished to join the Connection gave in his experience to the Association, and then withdrew while it was debated whether he should be admitted or not:”—and that, if this question was carried in the affirmative, the applicant should be called in, and a declaration of what the Connection believed respecting the most fundamental doctrines should be made to him; “that,” say they, “we may try if there be an agreement in religious sentiments.” Thus individuals were admitted into the Association: for it was not uncommon then for ministers to be ranked as members of the Association, whose churches were not in the Connection.

But, as the churches became more numerous, it was found necessary to establish some mode of admitting them into the Connection. At the Association at Castle-Donington, in 1777, it was agreed, that any church desiring admission should signify its request to the annual Association, which request should be inserted in the Minutes:—that, during the succeeding year, such church should send to every society in the Connection a written statement of their religious sentiments, with their thoughts on the character of a true christian, and the proper subjects of baptism and church-fellowship; and that their minister should accompany this statement with an account of his experience—that each church should transmit to

* Supra, p. 142.

the ensuing Association its resolution, whether it could or could not hold communion with such a people as a church of Christ—and that, if the result was then favourable, it should be considered as a branch of the Connection. This mode of admission continued, with a few occasional irregularities, for a number of years, to be the established practice of the Connection.

The increasing prosperity of the New Connection, and the declining state of the few churches which adhered to the Lincolnshire Association, naturally induced the latter to desire a re-union with the former. This was especially the earnest wish of the venerable Gilbert Boyce: and, thro' the whole of this period, he continued anxiously to labour to promote it. He sent an Address to the annual Association, at Boston, in 1776, expressing his strong desire for a re-union, and proposing certain "heads of agreement," on which he thought it might be effected. After mature deliberation, that meeting resolved, that the propositions of Mr. Boyce were insufficient for the purpose; but agreed that proposals should be made from the Association to Mr. Boyce and the Old Connection, as a basis for the desired reconciliation: and that a committee, consisting of Messrs. D. Taylor, W. Thompson, J. Grimley, A. Austin, and B. Worship, should be requested to prepare such proposals.

These proposals were accordingly drawn up, and presented to the Lincolnshire ministers, Jan. 1777, by Messrs. D. Taylor and W. Thompson. In May following, they were laid before the Old Association at Coningsby; and were accepted by that meeting, as grounds on which they were ready cheerfully to unite. In order, however, to render the union "perfect, solid, comfortable,

and lasting," they sent certain queries to the New Connection. These queries respected the willingness of the latter to join the general Assembly in London—their opinion as to the divine institution of the messenger's office and of imposition of hands on all baptized believers—and what those things were which they styled "indifferent." At the same time, Messrs. Boyce, Thornally, Anderson and Proud, were appointed to meet a committee of the New Connection, at Gosberton, on May 27th. 1777.

The Annual Association of the New Connection met, that year, at Castle-Donington; and these queries were laid before them. That meeting agreed, that the messenger's office and imposition of hands were not of divine institution—that singing of psalms and hymns—imposition of hands—the personality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the final perseverance of the saints—the imputation of Christ's active obedience to believers—occasional addresses to the Son and the Holy Spirit—the messenger's office—the pre-existence of Christ's human soul—and the eating of blood, might be esteemed less important matters, in which they ought to allow each other the liberty of thinking and acting according to their own views. Mr. D. Taylor was appointed to draw up answers to the queries; and he, together with Messrs. J. Grimley, N. Pickering, and W. Thompson were nominated to meet the deputation from the Old Connection. The deputies accordingly met, at Gosberton, May 27th 1777: and were attended also by Mr. G. Birley, of St. Ive's, and Mr. Poole, of Long Sutton. At the opening of the conference, a difficulty arose: the Lincolnshire ministers declaring, that they could not yet break with the general Assembly, with

which the other party refused to unite. The business, however, proceeded : and, after a discussion of nearly two days, the attempt failed, as each party adhered tenaciously to its own views.*

In 1784, the subject was again revived. The Lincolnshire association, which then consisted of only five representatives, sent Mr. Proud, jun. to attend the annual Association of the New Connection at Kirton, May 1784 : with this friendly message. "We are heartily willing and desirous to re-unite with our brethren who have separated from us, and others connected with them : hoping that they will be equally willing to unite again with us, for the mutual advantage of the whole interest." The members of the Kirton association gave these overtures a friendly reception : and it was mutually agreed that every one should be allowed to follow the dictates of his own conscience respecting imposition of hands, singing in public worship, the eating of blood, and the messenger's office. These preliminary concessions

* The following ingenuous replies to two queries, proposed by the deputies of the New Connection to the Lincolnshire ministers who met them on this occasion, exhibit very clearly the views and wishes of the latter. "Query. 1. What are the principal motives that induce you to labour after a re-union? Answer. 1. Because when you were united with us, you were likely to be of general service to us. 2. Because, since your separation from us, we have sustained material loss with respect to the state of religion among us. 3. Because we wish to enjoy your useful labours to strengthen and revive us. Query. 2. What can be the motives that induce you to adhere so closely to the old Assembly, the doctrines and practices of which have no tendency to promote vital religion? Answer. 1. Because we are not convinced that they maintain such doctrines and practices. 2. Because they have considerable additions in several places ; and appear to be hearty, faithful friends to real religion. 3. Because we esteem and love them." *Min. of Asso. N. C. 1777.*

were approved by the Lincolnshire association, held at Coningsby, in 1785 : and the prospect of ultimate success began to brighten. But it soon appeared, that however ardently the ministers of the Old Connection desired an union with the New, yet they were unable, even to accomplish this favourite purpose, to relinquish their ancient tenets and practices. At the Boston association, in 1785, Messrs. Boyce, Clark, and Proud attended, and stated, that they could not re-unite unless the New Connection practised laying on of hands on all persons received into church-fellowship, and abstained from the eating of blood. These conditions could not be accepted; and, for that time, the negotiation closed.

Another circumstance occurred, at the close of this period, which gave the ministers of the New Connection an occasion of explaining more fully their views of the London General Assembly. In 1783, Mr. William Kingsford, a worthy and opulent gentleman near Canterbury, proposed a plan for incorporating the whole body of general baptists in the kingdom into a kind of trading union ; by which manufacturers and tradesmen, masters and servants or apprentices, landlords and tenants, persons wishing to retire from business and those desirous of engaging in it, might readily gain intelligence of each other, and easily open a communication. This plan was, in 1783, submitted to the general Assembly in London, and to the annual Association of the New Connection ; and, being generally approved by both these meetings, was ordered to be laid before the churches. In 1784, the subject was discussed at large in the Association at Kirton. The members of that meeting jealous lest, by endeavouring to act with the general Assembly in temporal

concerns, their religious sentiments should be injured, previous to the discussion of Mr. Kingsford's plan, passed this resolution : "It is the unanimous voice of this Association, that we find ourselves obliged in conscience to except against what we call 'a close union' with all ministers and churches who assert the purity of the human nature, or deny the proper atonement of Christ for the sins of man, and justification before God and acceptance with him enjoyed by faith in Jesus Christ and not by works : which we apprehend to be very fundamental doctrines in the gospel system." They added, by way of explanation, that by excepting against a 'close union,' they meant, that they could not exchange pulpits with such ministers, receive members from such churches, nor make collections for the erection of their meeting-houses. After this precautionary measure, the plan was taken into detailed consideration ; and was generally approved. But, as it has never been carried into execution to any extent, it is needless to enlarge on the particulars.

The method of addressing Circular Letters to the churches, and sending them with the Minutes of the annual Associations, was early adopted, and found useful. The first epistle of this kind was sent from the Association at Loughborough, in 1772. It was drawn up, during the intervals of the meeting, by Mr. Dan Taylor, at the request of his brethren: and contained exhortations to heavenly-mindedness—diligence—self-examination—carefulness not to grieve the holy Spirit—and regard to eternal concerns. Mr. Taylor read it likewise at the meeting of the southern branch of the Connection at Bessell's Green, June 11th 1772 ; and it was signed by all the ministers

of both the Associations. It seems, that no other circular letters were sent till 1777 ; when it was unanimously resolved, by the Association at Castle-Donington, “ that an Association Letter should be every year drawn up; and that Mr. D. Taylor write one, this year, before the ministers separate, on the nature and obligation of church-fellowship.” This was done ; and similar addresses seem to have been issued by several succeeding Associations, mostly composed by the same hand. Only one of these has fallen under our notice : which was published in 1779 ; and explained the nature and utility of Associations.

In 1778, the Association strongly advised the churches to encourage their ministers to preach, as often as they could, in the villages around their respective stations. At their next meeting, in consequence of a case from Kegworth, they requested Mr. D. Taylor to publish a Catechism for the religious instruction of children. He accordingly printed, soon afterwards, a Manual, which has been highly acceptable and useful in the Connection.—Attempts were also made, towards the close of this period, to establish a fund for the education of young men for the ministry: but, as the plan was not matured till some years afterwards, we shall notice it in the next chapter.*

* Minutes of Assoc. of New Con. 1772—1785.—Min. Linc. Asso. 1772—1785.—Boston, Killingholme and Church Lane Records—Kingsford’s Plan—Circular Letters—and Information from the respective Churches.

CHAP. II.

THE HISTORY OF THE NEW CONNECTION DURING THE SECOND PERIOD OF FIFTEEN YEARS: OR, FROM A.D. 1785 TO A.D. 1800.

SECT. 1.—*The History of the Churches in the Midland Counties during the Second Fifteen Years after the Formation of the New Connection.*

IN glancing over the midland societies, our first attention is naturally drawn to the mother church at *Barton*. We left it, in 1785,* in a drooping state, in which it continued for several years. Many of the members were in low circumstances, and exposed to great hardships; and few persons of property or influence favoured the cause. Yet the church was blest with internal peace and union: and, in 1788, they boast, that “for seven years they had not had one jarring church-meeting.” In a few years, the cause began to revive. Their meeting-houses were crowded with attentive hearers; and many appeared to be inquiring the way to Zion. The hopes of the friends of religion were not disappointed: in 1794, no fewer than thirty-one were baptized and joined the church. This animated their ministers to increased exertions; and they pushed their labours, on every side, with great success. In 1798, the number of members amounted to two hundred and sixty; which were scattered over thirty villages, many miles distant from each other. At this time, they maintained re-

* *Supra* p. 148.

gular preaching at Hugglescote, Bosworth, Barlestone, Bagsworth, Odstone and Ratby: at all which places, except Ratby, they were well attended with hearers.

The success of the cause had rendered both the meeting-house and burying-ground at Hugglescote inadequate for the purpose designed. A friend offering them a piece of ground, the old meeting-house was pulled down, in 1797; and a more capacious and convenient one erected, and the burying-ground considerably enlarged.

In the following year, nearly one hundred of the members, who lived at Hugglescote and in its neighbourhood, separated from Barton and formed a distinct church. The remainder however continued their exertions, and soon after this division were encouraged, by an increasing number of hearers to build a small place of worship at Barlestone, to which the same agreeable cause induced them, in 1800, to add galleries. The expences of this building and alteration, together with the erection of Hugglescote meeting-house, exceeded six hundred pounds: great part of which was soon raised by the zeal and liberality of their own friends. These efforts were crowned with the divine blessing. In 1800, twenty-one were baptized; which raised the number of members to one hundred and eighty one.

In 1792, Mrs. Aldridge of Hugglescote imposed five pounds annually on one of her estates, towards the support of the ministers at Barton and Hugglescote: and, in case of separation, directed that it should be equally divided between the two churches. At the same time, the church raised a sum of money to be put out to accumulate at interest, in order to create a per-

mament fund. This fund was afterwards increased and vested in land ; the rents of which, after the decease of the ministers then living, were devoted to the support of the General Baptist interest at Barton.

The society at *Melbourn* which, in 1785, appears to have been in a flourishing state,* struggled for many years afterwards under considerable difficulties. In 1785, forty-six of the members who dwelt about Cauldwell separated, by mutual consent, and formed a distinct church. The pastors at *Melbourn* were advancing in years, and declining in mental and corporeal vigour. Some circumstances transpired, which occasioned Mr. Perkins to retire from preaching, some years previous to his death, which happened in January, 1792. And notwithstanding the weaknesses of old age, there is abundant reason to believe, that he is now singing that grace which, for forty years, he very successfully preached to others. Francis Smith, his colleague, though an ornament to his profession and still zealous to promote the cause of his Redeemer, yet, at seventy years of age, felt himself unable to support the exertions of his former days. The usual effects followed. For several years, they repeat their complaints of disorderly brethren and disagreeable circumstances : and the number of their members gradually decreased.

They had many places to supply with ministers and the only assistance which their aged pastor enjoyed was J. Smedley and Thomas Mee.†

* Supra p. 149.

† Thomas Mee, as a preacher, was never popular. During the last ten or twelve years of his life, he lost the use of his limbs ;

Their efforts to spread the gospel were thus checked; and they felt the necessity of an increase of preachers. At this juncture, R. Harper, who had been in connection with the Methodists, professing a change of sentiments, introduced himself, in Jan 1793, to the friends at Melbourn. Sensible of their need of help, and captivated with the warmth of his manner, and the expressions of piety and zeal which were constantly in his mouth, they inadvertently invited him to labour amongst them. It was in vain, that their aged pastor and more experienced brethren advised them to caution and warned them against precipitancy; the infatuated people ran in multitudes after their favourite; and, for a few months, their meeting-houses were crowded to excess. But the delusion soon ceased. The true character of this intruder discovered itself; and his admirers were compelled, very reluctantly indeed, to believe him to be both weak and wicked. He was unanimously forbidden to preach; and in the ensuing November, clandestinely left the town in disgrace.

The peace of the church being thus restored, they had, in a short time, a pleasing addition to their numbers. But their want of help in the great work of preaching increased. After various fruitless endeavours to obtain a supply, they were directed to Mr. Edmund Whitaker, who was then the pastor of the church at Burnley. Their application to him succeeded: and, in May, 1794, he removed with his family to Mel-

and was commonly drawn in a little waggon, by his friends, to the meeting-house at Packington, when he had to preach. His character as a christian was respectable. He began to preach about 1779, and died about 1795.

bourn. His labours were very respectable and highly blest. The number of hearers increased; many appeared to be seeking the way to Zion; and, in the succeeding year, forty-five were added to the church by baptism. It was found necessary, in the summer of 1795, to build a new meeting-house at Ticknall, a large village two miles from Melbourn, where their labours were crowned with encouraging success.

In the midst of these pleasing scenes, their venerable pastor, Francis Smith, was suddenly called to his reward. On the Lord's-day preceding his death, he rode to Packington, where he preached twice, and administered the Lord's supper. In the evening he went round and preached at Ticknall; and afterwards returned home: thus riding, during the day, nearly eighteen miles besides his other labour. In the succeeding week, on March 19th. 1796, he complained to his daughter of a pain in his breast; and, sitting down in his chair, expired in a few minutes, without a sigh or a groan. He had been diligently, faithfully and very successfully employed in the work of the ministry for nearly fifty years: and had uniformly maintained a character, as a man and a christian which had adorned his profession. The church, which had grown up under his fostering care, and been the constant object of his most anxious solicitude and earnest prayers, acknowledged his worth and deeply lamented their loss. Their grief was heightened by the death of Mr. Samuel Robinson, a worthy man, a sincere christian, and valuable deacon, who, about the same time, was torn from them in the midst of his activity and usefulness. In the same year also, Mr J. Smedley,

one of their elders and assistant preachers, was dismissed to serve the church at Retford.

The whole care of the church, now devolved on Mr. E. Whitaker, who was unanimously invited to the pastoral office, and ordained, July 3d. 1797. Soon after which, that branch of the church which assembled at Packington, having for some time suffered much inconvenience from the irregularity and uncertainty of their supplies, invited Mr. Joseph Goadby, a young preacher from Barton, to settle amongst them. This he did; and became their regular minister.

Mr. Whitaker's labours were blest to the building up of the cause; but his bodily strength soon began to fail; so that he could not exert himself to the extent of his desire. The symptoms of an asthma had long been growing upon him: and, in 1799, he was laid aside from preaching for fourteen weeks. His recovery was very doubtful; but he was at length restored to his sacred work.

At the close of this period, the church maintained regular preaching at six different places, which were generally well attended with hearers. The number of members amounted to two hundred and eighty-four: "they had several waiting for baptism, and many appeared in earnest respecting their eternal concerns."

The general baptists at *Cauldwell** were so well satisfied with the labours of Mr. Job Burditt, that, withdrawing from Melbourn, they formed themselves into a separate church; and called him to be their regular preacher. This took place, Dec. 25th. 1785. For a short time,

* Supra, p. 158.

the cause prospered : Mr. Burditt* was diligent, zealous, and successful. But, going to preach at a distant place, he contracted a severe cold which settled on his lungs. This brought on a rapid consumption, of which he died, April 27th. 1786.

This mysterious providence deeply affected his surviving friends. They assembled in the house of God, but their instructor was absent. Every heart was too full of its own sorrow to be able to offer any consolation to others. At length, to their surprize and comfort, Charles Norton, the son of Mr. Joseph Norton, who had been instrumental in introducing the gospel into Cauldwell, stood up, and read to his mourning brethren the encouraging words of our Saviour, John xiv. 1, " Let not your hearts be troubled," &c. On this text, he built some animating exhortations, which suited the circumstances of his hearers, and afforded them great support. His address was so seasonable and so well approved, that they immediately turned their thoughts to him as the successor of their lamented minister. He had been made a partaker of divine grace in the seventeenth year of his age, and was now about twenty-five. The church had encouraged him to exercise his gifts, in a private manner, before Mr. Burditt's decease ; and this unexpected instance of his aptness for the great work, induced them unanimously to call him to the work of the ministry. He was sent, for a few months, to receive the necessary instructions from Mr. S. Deacon, of Barton ; and, after his return, resumed his labours. His services being acceptable to his brethren, and blest to the conversion of sinners,

* Supra, p. 158.

he was invited to the pastoral office, and ordained, Sept. 16th. 1788.

His constitution was not strong ; and he was frequently afflicted with violent pains in his head. The fatigues and travels, occasioned by his ministerial engagements, increased his complaints. Being obliged to take a journey, in a deep snow, when he had scarcely recovered from a severe attack of his disorder, he lost his sight on the road. He could, at first, discern the light of a window ; but, in less than a year, he was involved in total darkness.

Though thus shut out from one great source of improvement, he continued his ministerial labours with credit to himself and profit to his hearers. He had studied his Bible diligently before his misfortune : and, possessing a good memory, and being personally acquainted with the sorrows and joys, the doubts and duties of vital christianity, his discourses were experimental and edifying. These repeated trials, however, prevented the extension of this society : and, during this period, the number of members continued almost unaltered : being stated, in 1786, at forty-six ; and, in 1800, amounting only to forty-three. At the Association in that year, they complain that “ religion was very low in some, and their minister indisposed.” This indisposition increased, till Aug. 6th 1800, when he emerged from darkness into everlasting day : leaving a widow and six small children to mourn his departure. His funeral sermon was preached by Mr. S. Deacon, from Heb. vi. 12.

At Kegworth* the cause of Christ continued,

* Supra, p. 157.

for many years, to extend its limits. Preaching was regularly supported at five places; and, at most of them, the congregations were numerous and attentive. In 1793, a commodious place of worship was built at Long-Whatton: and, in the following year, another at Sutton-Bonington. Two young men were, in 1797, called to the ministry: Joseph Jarrom, of Diseworth, and William Smith, of Sutton-Bonington. The former went soon afterwards to the Academy, and subsequently settled at Wisbeach. Respecting Mr. Smith, there arose a considerable difference of opinion, which caused a degree of uneasiness in the society, and, in 1798, issued in the withdrawing of the friends at Sutton, with the exception of a few individuals, from the fellowship of the society at Kegworth. About the same time, a deplorable misunderstanding arose between two of the leading men in the church; which affected the whole body, and, for many years, spread its baneful influence in every direction.

This was discouraging: but, to complete their embarrassments, Mr. Tarratt, their pastor, in 1799, laid aside his office. He was now about sixty-two years of age, and had been engaged in the sacred work nearly forty. His labours had been peculiarly acceptable; and made eminently useful in turning sinners to God. Indefatigable in his great work, his exertions had extended to most parts of the connection. His pulpit talents were of a superior order: a fine voice, a strong memory, a feeling heart, and a mind that naturally formed bold, clear and simple ideas. But, as he had not enjoyed the means of cultivating these excellent natural faculties, or of enriching his understanding by reading and study, his mental powers began early to decay. His youthful

vivacity disappeared ; his intellectual furniture was already exhausted ; and his public exercises became only the shadow of what they formerly had been. Besides this, his zeal to spread the tidings of salvation had necessarily caused him, in some measure, to neglect his temporal concerns ; and as, for many years, he received no remuneration for his ministerial services, and, even in the latter part of his course, but a very inadequate one, his circumstances at length were involved in embarrassments, from which the church supposed itself unable to extricate him. To complete his misfortune, he had, a few years previous, lost his wife, an excellent woman, who had been the chief support of his domestic credit ; and now he hastily formed a second union with a person whose years were thought unsuitable to his own. All these circumstances combined to create considerable dissatisfaction against him amongst the members of the church, and he retired from his station. He withdrew, indeed, under a cloud ; but those who knew him best were persuaded, that he would shine, in a better state, as the stars for ever. His secession did not restore harmony to this distracted society ; a painful degree of irritation continued ; and, the following Christmas, forty-five of the friends at Long-Whatton and Belton withdrew, and formed a distinct interest.

Nothing but the trunk now remained of this once flourishing church : about seventy-eight members residing at Kegworth and Diseworth : many of whom were old, and sinking into the grave. They, however, bore up under all these discouragements, and obtained what supplies they could from neighbouring ministers. In a

few months, they received intimation, that Mr. William Felkin, who then laboured at Ilkiston, was likely to remove; and made application to him. He complied with their unanimous call; and, in April, 1800, settled at Kegworth.

The church at *Ilkiston*,* which formerly had been united to Kegworth, became a distinct society, May 22d. 1785. It consisted of fifty members, who resided chiefly at Ilkiston and Smalley, and the places adjacent. Mr. Goddard was their regular preacher; and his services were so well approved by his brethren, that he was, in a few years, unanimously called to the pastoral office over them; to which he was ordained, on Whit-Monday, 1789, by Messrs. D. Taylor and B. Pollard. In the year following, a good meeting-house was erected at Smalley; which was opened about Michaelmas, by Mr. Goddard.

Harmony was maintained in this society, till the beginning of 1795; though, for two or three years, the progress of the cause had been slow. But, in that year, a charge of a very extraordinary nature was brought, by a near relative, against the pastor. This, though unsupported by any direct evidence, made a great impression on the minds of many. Mr. Goddard, thinking that some of the leading members lent too favourable an ear to this report, resigned his office, and withdrew from the church. He left things in a painful and dangerous state: the minds of the people being much agitated, and considerably dissatisfied with each other. A few supplies of ministers were obtained from the neighbouring congregations; but the principal dependance

* Supra p. 157.

was on Mr. Felkin, one of their own members, then in his twenty-third year. Though he anxiously wished, that the former pastor should resume his office, and was deeply sensible of his own unfitness for the sacred work; yet the importunity of his friends obliged him to attempt occasionally to speak in public. In Nov. 1795, he yielded, though very reluctantly, to the unanimous solicitations of the church, and began to preach regularly. His labours were blest. The congregations increased, and it soon became necessary to erect a gallery in the meeting house at Ilkiston. Conversions were also frequent: twenty being baptized, on a profession of faith, in the course of twelve months. This success continued for several succeeding years, and the cause prospered. In 1798, Mr. Felkin spent a few months at the Academy: and his place was kindly supplied, during his absence, by the neighbouring ministers. On his return, he resumed his labours with increased diligence and zeal. It was, however, soon apparent, that close application to his secular employment, regular preaching and long walks between the different places of worship, had injured his health. He therefore found it necessary, in order that his fatigues might be lessened, to propose a new arrangement to the church. His proposals were accepted with apparent cheerfulness: but, not long after, symptoms of dissatisfaction discovered themselves in a few individuals. These, Mr. Felkin observed: and, therefore, in the spring of 1800, accepted a call to Kegworth.

Yet, with all these discouragements, the cause of religion had prospered at Ilkiston. During this period, the members had increased to nearly three times their original number: being, in

1800, one hundred and forty-nine. The seasons of worship were well attended ; and they hoped, “that the cause of Christ was gaining a little ground amongst them”

We have been able to collect only a few particulars respecting the transactions of the church at *Castle-Donington*,* during the period under review. It separated from Kegworth, in 1785 ; and, for some time, enjoyed prosperity. The number of hearers was encouraging ; and many were added to the church : so that, in 1788, it consisted of upwards of one hundred members. The labours of Mr. N. Pickering, their pastor, were very acceptable and useful : and his two sons, Thomas and William, began, at the request of the church, to assist in the sacred work. At Sawley, indeed, the hearers at first were few, and the prospect discouraging ; but, in a few years, it improved, and there was evidence of a blessing on that attempt. At this time, they supplied once a month at Derby.

But, in 1789, Mr. W. Pickering went to reside at Ashford on the Peak : and, in the following year, his father resigned the pastoral office, and laid aside preaching. Mr. Thomas Pickering was, therefore, their only preacher ; but his character and abilities were highly esteemed by his friends. In 179 , he was ordained to the pastoral office over them ; when Mr. D. Taylor gave the charge to the minister.

Mr. T. Pickering fulfilled the various duties of his situation with diligence and wisdom ; in a manner highly to the satisfaction to the church. To use their own expression, “the gospel was

* Supra, p. 157.

preached in purity, and with energy and affection." For some time, the effect was pleasing: no fewer than thirty being baptized, in 1792. Though the success did not continue equally great; yet there was a gradual increase: and, in 1780 the number of members amounted to one hundred and thirty-seven.

We left the church at *Loughborough*, in 1785,* in a flourishing state, under the care of the worthy John Grimley; but this was soon interrupted by his sudden death. On Lord's-day, Aug. 5th. 1787, he preached, with unusual life and vigour, at Loughborough, Quorndon and Rothley: and the following Tuesday evening, he delivered an animated discourse at Loughborough, from 2 Tim. iv. 6—8. A day or two afterwards, he was seized with violent convulsions; and though prompt medical assistance was obtained, he continued speechless till the ensuing Lord's-day, when he expired. His remains were interred in the meeting-house at Loughborough; attended by many of his brethren in the ministry, and a numerous concourse of neighbours. His funeral sermon was preached, Aug. 26th. by Mr. S. Deacon, from Heb. vi. 12. His removal was a heavy loss, not only to the church over which he presided, but also to the whole connection. He had been a principal instrument in raising the general baptist interest in the midland counties: and, for upwards of forty years, had devoted his whole powers to its service. His piety, experience and prudence had enabled him to be highly useful in the general affairs of the churches: and the prosperous state of the

* Supra, p. 261.

cause at Loughborough, when he was called to his rest, sufficiently proves the success of his labours as a minister and pastor.

The death of Mr. Grimley involved the church in great difficulties. The management of so extensive a society, and the supply of four or five regular places of worship, called for abilities and strength of which they felt themselves destitute. But they were assisted beyond their expectations. The activity and wisdom of the leading members, now called into exercise by necessity, supplied, in a great measure, the loss of a pastor, in matters of government and discipline: and two of their members, Mr. John Pollard and Mr. R. Bird were induced, by the pressure of circumstances, with the approbation of their brethren, to endeavour occasionally to preach. Thus, under the divine blessing, the church was preserved from disunion and decline; and few of the places, in which the gospel had been preached, were neglected.

It was, however, thought necessary, to obtain, as soon as possible, a successor to their deceased pastor; and the eyes of the whole church were turned towards Mr. Benjamin Pollard, who had laboured amongst them, as an assistant preacher, for eight years; and was highly esteemed. He was accordingly called to the pastoral office; and publicly ordained, at Quorndon, Nov. 27th. 1787: when Mr. N. Pickering addressed the people; and Mr. S. Deacon, the minister, from John xxi. 13, "Feed my lambs."

In the following year, the old general baptist church at Mountsorrel, which had existed for upwards of a century, had so far declined, that the meeting-house was occupied as a hay-barn, and the burying-ground as a wood-yard; and

only two or three nominal members could be discovered in the neighbourhood. The trustees of the building, therefore, cheerfully accepted the proposal of the friends at Loughborough, to repair the meeting-house, and restore it to its original use. Preaching was thus revived in this village, which is only one mile south of Quorndon, and has been hitherto continued; though the success has not been so great as in some other places. In a short time afterwards, they began to preach, in a licensed dwelling-house, at Swithland, a village some distance west of Mountsorrel.

This increase of stations made it necessary to obtain an increase of labourers: and Mr. Thomas Truman, an assistant minister of Kirkby-Woodhouse church, was invited to settle amongst this people. With this invitation he complied; and removed to Quorndon, in Dec. 1790. In the following year, the church sold the lease of the old meeting-house at Loughborough; and, having purchased a small freehold estate, erected a large new place of worship, with three galleries, a large vestry, and a commodious baptistery. The whole expence was nine hundred pounds; and the building was opened, April 19th. 1792, by Messrs. D. Taylor and R. Smith.

The cause continued to extend itself. Preaching was introduced at various places, where, on account of the distance, it could not be continued. Yet regular public worship was maintained, at this time, at seven places; and at most of them the hearers were numerous. At Woodhouse-Eaves, their efforts were so successful, that the dwelling-house, in which they had hitherto preached, became too small to accommodate the increasing hearers. A new meeting-house was

accordingly erected in that village, at an expence of three hundred pounds, which was opened, Jan. 22d. 1797.

But a very affecting providence soon cast a deep gloom over the affairs of this flourishing society. Oct. 10th 1797, Mr. Truman, their assistant minister, who had laboured amongst them with great approbation for more than six years, went to deliver an evening lecture at Loughborough. Immediately after the conclusion of the service, he set out on his return to his residence at Quorndon ; and, though some of his friends offered to accompany him, on account of the darkness of the night, he declined the proposal. He had scarcely proceeded half a mile, when he met a cart ; and, at the same instant, a person, supposed to be intoxicated, rode past the carriage. The darkness prevented Mr. Truman from seeing the approach of the horse ; and the noise of the cart from hearing it ; so that, the horse, running against him, threw him down, and severely bruised him. Some of Mr. Truman's friends immediately coming up, conveyed him back to Loughborough. Here he assisted in undressing himself, and was put to bed. He complained of a pain in his head, and a surgeon was sent for ; who, after examining his bruises, declared there was no danger. In a few minutes, however, he expired. His remains were interred at Quorndon ; when Mr. Smith, of Nottingham, addressed a numerous and deeply affected audience, from James iv. 15 : and Mr. S. Deacon preached a funeral sermon, on Lord's-day, Nov. 22d., from Jer. xi. 7.*

* Mr. Truman was a native of Nottingham, and while young, became a member of the general baptist church in that

This awful stroke produced consequences of a very discouraging nature. Mr. J. Pollard had, some years previously, declined the work of the ministry; and there was now no regular preacher except Mr. B. Pollard, the pastor. The churches at Barton and Nottingham, indeed, exerted themselves honourably to lend them assistance; but the supplies thus kindly afforded were inadequate to the necessities of so large a church. They obtained the labours of Mr. Briggs, of Gosberton, who settled amongst them, in 1799: but this measure was not so satisfactory as might have been wished. After this, a Mr. Matthewson, a methodist preacher, professed to be convinced of the necessity of believers' baptism, and was received into this church, in Nov. 1800. He was called to exercise amongst them as a preacher; and, for some time, hopes were entertained that he would be made useful; but, being unsettled in his sentiments, he left them in less than two years.

But, in the midst of these difficulties, they

town. Here he was first called to the ministry, and preached for some time with considerable acceptance. The society at Kirkby-Woodhouse being destitute of a preacher, he settled amongst them, and his labours there were much blessed. After his removal to Quorndon, he taught a school, to which profession he had been educated. He was kind, industrious and useful as a schoolmaster, and was esteemed one of the best penmen of his age. He is thus described, by one of his surviving brethren. "Brother Truman's character, as a christian, was unimpeachable. I knew not his equal. As a husband perhaps without an equal. As a parent, most tender and affectionate. As a schoolmaster, exceedingly attentive and successful. As a member of society, universally approved. As a minister, very close in his exhortation: very firm in what he believed to be the truth: and very improving indeed. His real worth gained amazingly on the affections of the people."

G. B. Mag. Vol. I. pp. 14.

continued their exertions for the good of their neighbours, as well as for their own improvement. They embraced a favourable opportunity of purchasing a piece of ground at Rothley: on which they erected a new meeting-house, in 1800, at an expence of three hundred pounds. About the same time, they licensed a dwelling-house at Wanton, in the Wolds, and their meetings were well attended. They also formed two reading societies, for their improvement in knowledge: one at Loughborough, and the other at Quorn-don. At the latter place, too, a sunday-school was established; which, in 1800, contained one hundred scholars. This society then extended over a large tract of country; had increased to four hundred members, who dwelt in more than thirty villages; had eight places of public worship, all which were well attended with hearers; and religion was thought to be on the advance amongst them.

The cause of religion made little progress at *Leake*,* for several years after the commencement of this period: but, in 1794, the scene changed. The seed, which had been sown in hope, began to bring forth abundant fruit. In the course of two years, more than eighty persons were baptized, and added to the church; and the various places of worship were crowded with attentive hearers. At Broughton, a village seven miles north-east of Wimeswold, where the gospel had been preached for several years, the prospect was so encouraging, that it was determined to erect a new meeting-house, for the accommodation of the increased hearers. This was effected

* Supra p. 162.

in 1795, at an expence of upwards of two hundred pounds.

An attempt was made, by the friends at Leake, in 1791, to introduce the gospel into Hose, a small village in the vale of Belvoir, about five miles north-east of Broughton. Appearances were, at first, very encouraging : the hearers were numerous, and several joined the church. This exasperated the enemies of religion; and a bitter spirit of persecution soon manifested itself.—Bells, horns, and the most dreadful imprecations, were employed to annoy the intruders and their abettors. The meetings were riotously broken up ; and the hearers assaulted with the most opprobrious insults, as they peaceably walked the streets. Sometimes the rabble proceeded so far, as to follow them to their own houses, and break their windows. Mr. Thurman, the minister, was frequently exposed to great danger of bodily injury ; but Providence preserved both him and his friends from harm. The enemies of the truth, however, gained, for the present, their object ; and the attempt was suspended. This victory was celebrated by their persecutors with ringing of bells, and other demonstrations of triumph.

But the bread cast on the waters was found again after many days. In about seven years afterwards, Mr. Thomas Hoe, a native of this village, began to exercise his gifts amongst his neighbours in prayer and exhortation ; and several seemed disposed to encourage his attempts. This revived the former opposition : and every species of artful cruelty and open violence was used, to crush the rising spirit. During the time of worship, the garments of the hearers were frequently cut in pieces with knives ; and, in returning to their habitations, they were followed

with volleys of stones, brickbats and dirt. Mr. Hoe, and his fellow-labourers, were repeatedly in considerable danger; yet, in defiance of all opposition, they persevered, and finally succeeded. The word preached by them was made the power of God to the conversion of several, in this den of bigotry; and the gospel still continues to be declared at Hose.

The cause had now spread itself on every side; and there were four or five stations to supply with regular preaching. Mr. Thurman, though diligent and zealous, could not occupy them all. For several years, assistance was obtained from the ministers at Nottingham; but, in 1798, it was thought necessary to endeavour to procure a regular assistant preacher. After seriously deliberating on the subject, it was resolved to invite Mr. John Bissill, of Little-Ponton, near Grantham. He was a member of the ancient general baptist society at Knipton; and had been called to the ministry by that church. In his excursions for spreading the gospel, he had penetrated as far as Hose, and shared in the labours and persecutions which attended the introduction of the word into that village. This led to an acquaintance with the friends at Broughton and the church at Leake, which issued in their requesting him to settle amongst them. He complied with their request: and, after spending some time at the Academy, fixed his residence at Wimeswould, in the spring of 1800.

Thus reinforced, the cause flourished: and this animating report was made to the ensuing Association: "We have long prayed for a revival: and now, in some branches of the church, we behold it with joy. We have public worship in five villages. Hearers in most of our places

are numerous and attentive: many, we hope, feed on the bread of life. Not a few of our members are lively and active: and, upon the whole, vital religion appears to be on the advance. We hope yet to see better days than these." The number of members then was two hundred and fifty-seven.

As we have not been able to obtain any regular information respecting the church in *Friar Lane, Leicester*, our account of it must be very general. In 1785, a new meeting-house had been erected; and the cause of religion appeared to prosper.* April 26th. 1786, Mr. John Deacon, who had for some time laboured amongst them, was ordained to the pastoral office, by Messrs. D. Taylor and W. Thompson. For several years afterwards, their seasons of public worship were well attended: and though various circumstances occurred to interrupt the harmony of the church, yet there was a constant improvement. Prayer meetings were established which produced beneficial effects; and preaching was maintained with encouraging prospects, at three or four neighbouring villages. In 1793, twenty-three persons were baptized, on a profession of faith and added to the church, and the number of members then exceeded one hundred.

But, about that period some very distressing reports were spread, which deeply affected the character of the pastor. This caused much unhappiness, and alteration in the society; and their proceedings appear to have been marked with too much heat and precipitancy. Many of the disaffected members were hastily excluded;

* Supra p. 164.

and several others withdrew: so that, in 1796, the number had decreased to seventy-six. The business was brought before the Association, at Hinckley, in 1793; and, as it was a matter of considerable delicacy, it was referred to a secret committee.* The members of this committee censured the conduct of the majority, as unscriptural and disorderly: and advised them to make proper acknowledgments to the parties concerned; and endeavour to heal the breach which their proceedings had caused. Similar advice was subsequently given by various conferences; but it seems that little attention was paid to it. Complaints were, therefore, again sent to the succeeding Association; and the subject was then openly investigated. The conduct of the minority was generally approved by this meeting, and a letter of reproof written to the majority. In this letter, they were admonished to follow the advice given by the former committee; and required to send delegates to the Leicestershire conference: "in order," they say, "to effect a proper understanding between us; as we cannot think of encouraging, with our approbation or connection, persons so extremely irregular in their discipline, and who do not think it necessary to satisfy their grieved brethren in a case of this nature." What effect this measure produced we are not informed: but, in 1795, Mr. J. Deacon attended the Association, as the representative of this church; when it was stated to be peaceable and tolerably happy.

* The appointing of *secret* Committees was highly disapproved by some of the Yorkshire churches, who protested against this mode of proceeding, at the next Association: and, we believe, that secret committees have never been resorted to, except in this instance.

The cause of religion at *Hinckley*, in 1785, was flourishing at the outposts, but rather in a distracted state at head-quarters. Harmony, however, appears to have been soon established; and, for several years, they state themselves to be united and peaceable. In 1787, Mr. John Shipman, their ruling elder, was so much indisposed, as to deprive them, for some time, of his services. Yet they persevered in their endeavours to spread the tidings of salvation; and, in 1791, had three commodious meeting-houses, in which they maintained regular worship every Lord's-day; besides three licensed dwelling-houses, where they frequently preached. But, with these multiplied labours, they complain, that few were added to the church; and evidently were in a low state.

Towards the middle of this period, Mr. Joseph Bentley, a highly esteemed member of this society, was called, by his brethren, to the work of the ministry; and, at first, his labours were very acceptable. But unhappily meeting with some socinian writings, his mind became unsettled, and his usefulness was at once terminated. His friends felt deep regret in withdrawing from him: but the honour of the truth required the measure. For some years, he wandered from one party to another; till he ceased, at length, from attending public worship in any form.

About 1794, symptoms of a revival began to appear, in several branches of this society, which, for a few years, continued to increase. They had established six distinct stations, at which they supported regular preaching: their services were

* *Supra*, p. 158.

well attended; and additions to the church were more frequent. But, towards the close of the century, appearances became less encouraging. In 1798, they complain "of carnal mindedness in some, want of wisdom and charity in others, and the bad conduct of too many;" and observe that, "on the whole, their prospect was not very agreeable." Towards the close of this year, their diligent and worthy pastor, Mr. William Smith, was called to his reward. This good man, as we have formerly seen,* had been very instrumental in the introduction of the general baptist cause into Longford and Hinckley: and, on the division into two churches, had become the pastor of the society at Hinckley. In that station, he diligently exerted himself for the conversion of sinners and the edification of the saints, till his decease. Though destitute of the advantages of a liberal education, he possessed strong natural faculties. The Bible was the principal subject of his study, and he obtained a good acquaintance with the doctrines and duties of christianity: being, like most of his fellow labourers, an excellent textuary. He was regular in his attendance at Conferences and Associations; and, even when the distance was great, travelled always on foot. His labours in the gospel were rendered very useful: and many, there is good reason for believing, will at last be found, on the right hand of the Judge, whom he brought into the path of life, and trained up for a blessed immortality. His death was occasioned by a mortification, which took place in his hand, and, spreading rapidly over the whole frame, in a few days terminated his life. His funeral sermon was preached, by Mr. J. Tarratt, of Keg-

* Supra, pp. 40 and 166.

worth, to a very crowded auditory, from Acts xx.
25. He was sixty-nine years of age; more than forty of which had been laboriously employed in the christian ministry.

The church being now destitute of a pastor, and learning that Mr. Joseph Freeston, who was then labouring at Wisbeach, had some intentions of removing, sent a messenger to him, to enquire into the true state of affairs; and, if there appeared an opening, to invite him to Hinckley. After mature deliberation, he consented to their unanimous request; and, removing in July, 1799, took the oversight of this church. At that time, it consisted of one hundred and forty-four members: and regular preaching was maintained at Hinckley, Thurlaston, Wolvey, and Witheybrook; besides occasional services at Dunton, Ullesthorpe and a few other places.

At the close of the last period, the church at *Longford* was left without a pastor, but very desirous of obtaining one.* This desire continued: and, in 1786, they applied to the Association for advice, respecting the propriety of inviting Mr. Freeston to remove from Wisbeach and settle with them. That meeting, after debating on the subject, as seriously and impartially as possible, concluded, that "it would be most for the good of souls and the glory of God, for Mr. Freeston to remain at Wisbeach." Thus discouraged as to this object, they turned their eyes towards Mr. Thomas Pickering, who had lately begun to preach at Castle-Donington; and, the year following, asked the advice of the Association on the subject; when a large majority

* Supra, p. 171.

declared in favour of his removing to Longford. For some reason, however, with which we are unacquainted, the negotiation did not then succeed. And, in 1788, the Association repeated its recommendation of the same measure, with as little effect.

Not being able to obtain Mr. T. Pickering, the friends at Longford applied to Mr. R. Folds, the pastor of the church at Burnley, in Lancashire; who removed to them, in March, 1789. They now cherished sanguine hopes, that they should enjoy those privileges and benefits, of which they had been so long deprived, through the want of a pastor. This inspired them with renewed zeal; and the cause appeared to revive: their hearers increased: and, in a few months, eighteen were added to their society. But all these pleasing scenes suddenly vanished. Mr. Fold's temper and conduct were inconstant and irregular; and, in less than a year, he left them.

This plunged the church into new difficulties; and the natural effects ensued. Disunion and altercation among themselves, and want of proper ministerial supplies, checked the progress of the cause, and thinned their congregations: many even of their own members, seldom attending at their places of worship; but seeking that edification among other denominations which they could not enjoy in their own. From this discouraging state, they were, in some degree, relieved, in 1791; when Mr. J. Cramp, a member of the church, was encouraged, by his brethren, to exercise his gifts as a preacher. This he did to their satisfaction, and continued to labour amongst them with increasing acceptance. From this time, the prospect began to brighten, and the union and peace of the church were gradually

restored. Another of their friends was soon after called to the work of the ministry, and became acceptable as an occasional preacher: while Mr. Cramp's services grew every day more useful. In 1797, they say, "We are well attended with hearers; have of late experienced a considerable revival; and have a pleasing prospect before us." Their hopes were not disappointed; as, in the two succeeding years, nearly forty persons appear to have been added to their number. Their reports continued encouraging, till 1800; when the members amounted to one hundred and thirty; and they had a few candidates for baptism.

Throughout the whole of this period, this church maintained regular preaching at two places at some distance from Longford, and were well attended with hearers.

At the commencement of the period now under review, the society which had been formed at *Sutton-Coldfield**, assumed the title of the church at *Birmingham*, from having established an interest in that populous town. There appears, indeed, to have been a few general baptists at Birmingham ever since the time of the Commonwealth; but they had almost vanished, when Mr. Austin and his friends began to preach at Sutton-Coldfield. These zealous christians soon extended their labours to Birmingham; and several of the inhabitants joined them. In 1772, they had increased to seventeen; when, wishing more frequently to hear the gospel, they hired a room in Park-street; but afterwards removed to a more commodious one in *Needless-alley*. Here Mr. Austin occasionally preached, and not with-

* Supra p. 170.

out some success, during the whole of his residence at Sutton-Coldfield.

In 1784, Providence led Mr. Joseph Green, a worthy member and an occasional preacher in Mr. Austin's church, to settle at Birmingham. Soon after his removal, he was seized with a severe indisposition, and laid aside from his temporal engagements. During this affliction, he formed the design of endeavouring to erect a building, for the purpose of preaching the word of life to his careless neighbours. On his recovery, he, in concert with Mr. Austin, began in good earnest to prosecute the design; and a neat and commodious meeting-house was soon raised, in Lombard-street, Deritend; which was opened, Sept. 1786

But soon after the completion of the building, they were deprived of their minister, by Mr. Austin's removal to London. In this emergency, every eye was turned to Mr. Green, who had been their principal friend, and whose past services in the sacred work had been much blessed. They, therefore, earnestly requested him to become their regular minister; and, thinking himself called upon by Providence, to attempt to support the cause, he complied with their wishes. Through the whole of this period, he diligently laboured for this society, and carefully watched over its interests; though, probably owing to his extreme modesty, he was never ordained to the pastoral office.

Mr. Green received important assistance, in the ministry of the word, from Mr. W. Taylor, a member of Sutton-Coldfield church, who then resided at Wolverhampton, and had, for some time, been acceptably employed in the ministry. His labours were frequent and useful, both at

Sutton and Birmingham, till 1796; when he was dismissed, to take the charge of the church at Boston. In that year, also, the cause sustained a heavy loss, in the death of Mr. William Cotterell. This pious young man had discovered great concern for the prosperity of Zion, and was highly esteemed for his activity, zeal and prudence in the affairs of religion. He had likewise begun to exercise his gifts as a preacher, to the great satisfaction of his friends; who looked forwards, with sanguine hopes, to his future eminence and usefulness. But all these expectations were disappointed: he died, Nov. 7th 1796, in the twenty-sixth year of his age. To supply these breaches Mr. Yates soon after removed to Birmingham; and it was hoped that it might contribute to the advancement of religion.

The cause of Christ had thus far been carried on in concert: but, towards the close of the present period, symptoms of discord began to appear, which, in 1800, terminated in a separation into two distinct societies, known afterwards as the *Birmingham* and *Sutton-Coldfield* churches. The former, at the time of the division, consisted of forty-one members; and the latter, of thirty-three. At the ensuing Association, the friends at Birmingham blessed God that they were in a peaceable state; and expressed their cheerful hopes, that their loss of members would be supplied by the accession of fresh converts, who would adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour.

The admission of Mr. Robert Smith into the fellowship of the church at *Nottingham*,* had a happy effect on the prosperity of the cause in

* Supra, p. 177.

that town. Minister and people became better known and more respected by their observant neighbours: the church was more regularly organized, proper officers being chosen and discipline improved. The natural effect was an increase of hearers; and additions to the society became more frequent. On July 30th. 1786, no fewer than thirty-two persons were baptized, on a profession of faith, before thousands of spectators, in the river Trent.

For upwards of two years after Mr. Smith's removal, the pastors of neighbouring churches were invited to administer the Lord's supper to this people. But their satisfaction with their minister strengthening, and the evidence of his usefulness daily increasing, they became anxious for a closer union, and pressed him to accept the pastoral office among them. This he at first declined, through a deep sense of the importance and difficulty of the sacred office; but a sense of duty and a desire to promote the welfare of the church, at length induced him to yield a trembling assent. He was ordained, April 1st. 1788: when Mr. W. Thompson, of Boston, gave the charge to the minister, from 1 Tim. iv. 6; and Mr. D. Taylor, of London, addressed the people, from Phil. iv. 3. This was a good day to the friends of the gospel: and the union then formed, has been eminently blest by the great Head of the church.—About this time, five or six meetings for religious conversation and experience were established in various parts of the town, and two leaders appointed over each: a plan which greatly promoted the interest of vital religion.

Thus settled in gospel order, they extended the field of labour and maintained regular preaching at Cresswell, Aslocton and Thurgaton; places

at ten or twelve miles distance. But they still continued to complain of coldness and disorder; and, though many were frequently added to the church, yet, the number of exclusions and deaths being, for some time, nearly equal, the real increase was small. In 1792, however, the state of affairs began to improve; and they informed the Association, that, " notwithstanding some disagreeable circumstances, the church was peaceable and happy; and as well established as at any former period: their hearers were increasing, and they had ten candidates for baptism." They commenced preaching, also, about this time, at Arnold and Basford. At most of their meetings in the neighbouring villages they were well attended with hearers; and at Thurgaton and Basford, the word preached had considerable success.

The church and congregation continued to increase; and, in a few years, the meeting-house became too small to accommodate them. It was also thought by many to be in a very ineligible situation; and, by its obscurity and incommodiousness, materially to retard the progress of the cause. Towards the end of this period, therefore, a piece of ground was purchased, in a respectable part of the town: and a very convenient and spacious meeting-house erected, at an expence of nearly two thousand pounds. This was opened, Nov. 9th. 1799, by Messrs. B. Pollard and W. Felkin: the former preached in the morning and afternoon, from 1 Kings ix. 3, and Haggai ii. 7; and the latter, in the evening, from Psalm lxxxix. 15, 16. More than a thousand persons, it is supposed, assembled on each part of the day; and a serious joy was depicted on every countenance. Nearly eighty pounds were

collected on the occasion. Several hundred pounds had been previously raised, by the zealous and liberal exertions of the members of this society and the friends of religion in the town, towards this great work ; and many in the sister churches generously lent their assistance.

The hopes of the friends were happily realized. The number of hearers increased, and the prospect of future success was very encouraging. In the succeeding year, eighteen were added by baptism, and the members of the church were two hundred and eighty-five.

During this period, several persons were called to the work of the ministry ; most of whom we shall probably have occasion to notice in the next chapter.

In 1785, we left the church at *Kirkby-Woodhouse* in a very low state.* It continued to decline till, in 1787, the members were reduced to

* Supra p. 165.

A few particulars respecting the introduction of the General Baptist cause into Kirkby-Woodhouse, having lately come to hand, we present our readers with the substance of them.—John Alvey, an inhabitant of this place, accidentally heard Stephen Dixon preach on Selstone Green, and felt desirous of knowing more of his doctrine. When therefore the preacher came again into the neighbourhood, he determined to go and hear him ; and, calling on G. Allen, his intimate acquaintance, informed him of his design. “What,” exclaimed his friend, “art thou going to hear that fool ?” Mr. Alvey repeated his resolution ; and invited the other to accompany him. Prompted, most probably, by curiosity, Mr. Allen assented ; and, from that time, both the friends became firmly attached to the cause. They soon invited the ministers to Kirkby : and Mr. Allen opened his house for the preaching of the gospel. This led to the erection of the meeting-house, in 1755. (*Supra p. 26.*)

The friends of the cause here, experienced their share of the persecution to which its first advocates were exposed.—In 1749,

seventeen. In the spring of that year, Mr. Truman, whose affecting death we have already recorded,* was dismissed from the church at Nottingham to serve this drooping interest. The labours of this pious young man were re-

S. Dixon, while preaching at Moorgreen, a few miles from Kirkby, was seized by the mob, dragged to a neighbouring pond, and put under the water. Several of his followers held farms and houses under Lord Melbourn; and through the ill-will of a neighbour, who was under-steward to his Lordship, were driven from their possessions, on account of their religion. The clergyman of the parish being a violent enemy to the baptists, took every opportunity to harass them. He endeavoured to frighten or persuade the less informed to take their children to be sprinkled; and would probably have succeeded in some instances, had not their more intelligent friends interfered. This drew down his vengeance on them: and he threatened to prosecute John Alvey, in the spiritual court, for teaching school without a licence; but was deterred by an appeal, through Mr. Booth, to the Deputies appointed to protect the civil rights of Dissenters. He refused to sign necessary certificates in their favour, took measures to dispossess them of their tenures, and used every effort to prevent them from administering the ordinance of baptism according to their own views. One summer, having a few candidates for baptism, and being shut out from the place to which they usually resorted on such occasions, they went several miles upon the forest to a fish pond. From this accommodation they were driven, after some debate, by the gamekeeper of the gentleman to whom it belonged. Undismayed by these repeated disappointments, they travelled five miles farther, till they found another pool of water, where they administered the sacred ordinance. But the most distressing persecution which these professors suffered from the persevering enmity of this man, was his constant endeavours to entice away their youth, by presents, feasts, and other allurements, by putting some of them to school, and using every art to prejudice them against the religion, and even the persons of their parents. By these means he succeeded, in some instances, in totally estranging the affections of the children from their disconsolate parents. Yet these christians bore all this opposition and affliction with patience and firmness, and many of them bore a dying testimony to the goodness and faithfulness of God.

* Supra, p. 235.

markably blest. Before the next Association, eighteen persons were added to the church by baptism: their seasons of preaching were well attended, and the members united and happy. Several were waiting for fellowship, and others were seriously inquiring the way to Zion. During this summer, Mr. George Hardstaff, a member of this society, chiefly through the encouragement and assistance of Mr. Truman, was called to the work of the ministry, and became very useful in preaching the gospel. They now extended their labours, and introduced themselves into Sutton-in-Ashfield, a small place about three miles distance from Kirkby-Woodhouse; and, occasionally, visited Mansfield, a large and populous town, five miles to the east.

But the progress of the cause soon received a serious check, by the removal of Mr. Truman; who, at Christmas, 1789, accepted an invitation from the flourishing society at Loughborough. The disorderly conduct of some of the members increased the effect; and, for some years, the number decreased. Their congregation however continued to be considerable: Mr. Hardstaff's ministry became daily more acceptable, both to his own friends and to strangers. Towards the close of this period, the prospect brightened; and, in 1799, besides Kirkby, they maintained regular preaching in four neighbouring places: Sutton-in-Ashfield, Hucknall, Tarkard and Brunsley. At all these places, they were well attended; but, at the last two the appearance was peculiarly encouraging. The church was united and peaceable, and the interest of the Redeemer evidently on the advance.

Mr. Hardstaff, being thus blest in his ministerial labours, was called to the pastoral office; to which he was ordained, Aug. 14th. 1799. On this occasion, Mr. R. Smith delivered the introductory discourse; Mr. B. Pollard gave the charge to the minister; and Mr. S. Deacon addressed the church.—In June 1800, the number of members was sixty-three.

We conclude this section by noticing several churches in the midland counties, which, though not immediately derived from the original society, became, during this period, members of the New Connection. These were the churches at Gamston and Retford, at Derby and at Ashford on the Peak, Derbyshire.

The person who first introduced the general baptist cause into the neighbourhood of *Gamston*, was Aaron Jeffery. He appears to have been connected in early life with the ancient churches of that denomination at Collingham and Merton; which had probably been formed prior to the Restoration, and shared in all the persecutions which followed that event. In his neighbourhood, was the seat of the earl of Clare, a nobleman of liberal sentiments; and Aaron, when yet a young man, determined to seek a situation in his family. He accordingly applied: and, being asked whether he had brought a character, answered, “No; but I am a general baptist.” The earl, it seems, thought this a sufficient certificate, and immediately engaged him as a footman. In this situation, he continued many years; and his steadiness, integrity and civility gave great satisfaction to his employer, and procured himself great respect. One circumstance indeed, for a time, grieved the tender conscience of this

pious youth. He was frequently employed, by his master, in carrying messages to a distance, on a Lord's-day. This he felt was inconsistent with his duty to his heavenly Master ; and he resolved, at all events, to decline it. When, therefore he was again called into the parlour, on the Lord's-day morning, and ordered to go on business to a neighbouring town, he replied, in a manly, though respectful tone, " My Lord, I stand ready to obey your orders six days in the week; but this day I have a greater Master than you to serve." Instead of being irritated at the freedom of his servant, this nobleman mildly replied, " Have you ? Why then go and serve him :" and treated him afterwards with increased confidence.

Aaron being now at full liberty to follow the dictates of his own conscience, regularly walked, on the Lord's-day morning, from Houlton-hall to Collingham, a distance of twelve miles, to join in the worship of God with his friends. He usually attended as a hearer ; but, in cases of necessity, ascended the pulpit in his gold-lace livery, both at Collingham and Misterton, and preached with considerable acceptance. One morning, as he was on the road to Collingham, he met his master, who enquired whither he was going. On being informed of the object and length of his journey, the earl gently reproached him : " Aaron," said he, " why do you not take one of my horses ?" at the same time, desiring that in future he would ride whenever he thought proper.

After having lived as footman for several years, he married ; and his master, unwilling to part with a servant whom he so highly esteemed, appointed him the keeper of his park, and placed

him at Houlton-lodge, about three miles from Gamston. Here he continued to serve his patron with integrity for many years ; till a change in his Lordship's circumstances rendered his service no longer necessary. On this event, he took a farm, which was then vacant at Gamston, and removed thither, with a wife and six children. No sooner was he established in his new situation, than he began to hold meetings for prayer and exhortation, in his own house : and engaged zealously in conducting them. These opportunities were well attended, and made very useful ; and laid the foundation of the future church at Gamston. After having attained a good old age, Mr. Jeffery, and his worthy consort were called to their reward, within a few hours of each other : he dying Nov. 23d. 1729 ; and she the following day. Their remains were interred together in Gamston church-yard.

His youngest son Joseph, then twenty-seven years of age, succeeded to his farm. This worthy and pious youth was baptized not long after the death of his venerable father, and joined the church at Collingham. He continued the meetings in his own house ; and obtained a licence for it under the Toleration Act. Neighbouring ministers were invited to preach for them, and the number of hearers gradually increased ; so that, in less than eight years, the house became too small to accommodate them. He determined, therefore, to build a meeting-house on his own farm ; and waited on his landlord, the duke of Newcastle, to solicit his permission. Having obtained this, he imparted his design to a few of his friends : who entered heartily into his views. By their joint exertions, a convenient place of worship was erected, and opened in 1741. Pre-

vious to that time, Mr. Joseph Jeffery had begun to preach and baptize at Gamston; and afterwards he appears to have acted as pastor to the society which he had collected. Till 1763, he laboured alone; but in that year, Mr. John Dossey was chosen co-pastor with him.

This union strengthened their hands, and they extended their labours to several neighbouring places: especially to Ashford in Derbyshire, where their generous interference was made very useful. They likewise introduced the general baptist cause into Retford; in which town a very respectable branch of their interest was soon raised. They pursued their sacred work with diligence, zeal and success: and, though all their exertions in the ministry were gratuitous, yet a good Providence blest even their temporal concerns. But, in 1778, Mr. Dossey ceased from his labours, in his sixty-third year. His remains were interred in the meeting-house; and Mr. D. Taylor was invited to preach his funeral sermon.

The work of the ministry and care of the church now devolved wholly on Mr. Jeffery, who was already stooping under the burden of age. In this time of trial, he found a very useful assistant in Mr. R. Bellamy, a worthy and pious member of this society; who, though not possessed of shining abilities, was well qualified to conduct the affairs of the church. Messrs. D. Taylor, W. Thompson, A. Booth, and G. Boyce, the old friends of Mr. Jeffery, used frequently, when on their journeys, to preach for him. Thus, for some time, the cause was, in a good degree, supported; but, as Mr. Jeffery's infirmities increased, it was found necessary to seek for more permanent supply. After due consideration, the church invited Mr. Jonathan Scott, an occasional

preacher at Queenshead, in Yorkshire, to be the colleague of their venerable minister. This invitation he accepted; and, removing to Gamston, in 1785, he was ordained, May, 1786, to the office of joint-pastor with Mr. Jeffery.

When Mr. Scott settled at Gamston, the church consisted of only fifty-seven members, and the cause was in a declining state. But he was a man of a zealous and persevering spirit, of an affable and engaging conduct, and of a strong constitution. He laboured strenuously and affectionately: was earnest in his public ministrations, and diligent in exhorting from house to house. He exerted himself to procure the reparation of the meeting-house, which had fallen considerably into decay; and, by his example, inspired the friends of the Redeemer with new zeal and vigour. His efforts were crowned with considerable success, in reviving the interest in this neighbourhood; and his frequent visits to the churches in Lincolnshire, especially Merton and Kirton, were rendered highly useful.—Though differing considerably from his worthy colleague in his views of several important doctrines, yet they cordially united in their endeavours to promote the salvation of sinners and the glory of God. In 1786, this church applied for admission into the New Connection; and the following year was unanimously received.

The cause continued to advance. In 1790, they informed the Association, that, "at no former period, had their church been so unanimous, nor the cause of Christ so prosperous, as it then was." In the preceding year, twenty-one had been baptized; and the members had increased to ninety-five. But, in a few years, a dark cloud overspread these bright prospects.

Mr. Jeffery, their senior pastor, sunk under the weight of years, March 14th. 1794, at the advanced age of ninety : and Mr. Scott, though a much younger man, fell a victim to a disease which baffled the power of medicine, July 24th. following, in his fifty-fifth year. Thus bereaved, in the course of a few months, of both its pastors, the widowed society owed much to the pious and friendly care of Messrs. Bellamy and Shipston ; who were active in keeping open the meetings, and preserving the members from wandering. Supplies were invited from various neighbouring churches ; and Messrs. Rogers, Hardstaff, Briggs, Ellis and John Smedley, in succession spent some time amongst them. The members, however, were desirous of obtaining a regular minister ; and, being almost equally well satisfied with each of these five ministers, they resolved to refer the choice to the casting of lots. The lot fell on Mr. John Smedley, who had been previously recommended to them by the Association. They requested him to settle with them ; and he removed from Melbourn to Retford, Oct. 1795.

Soon afterwards, Mr. Shipston and Mr. Skidmore were called to assist in preaching the gospel, and the cause appeared to gain ground. But, at the close of this period, some discouraging circumstances occurred ; and religion, as they express it, “ appeared to be at a stand.” The number of members, in 1800, was seventy-five.

Derby is an ancient and respectable town, containing nearly eleven thousand inhabitants. Mr. D. Taylor, being on a journey, had occasion to pass through this place, May 31st. 1789 ; and was induced to preach, on Willow Row, near the place where the meeting-house now stands,

from Luke ii. 10, "I bring you good tidings of great joy." This attempt encouraged Messrs. N. and T. Pickering, of Castle-Donington, to visit Derby, and preach several times at the same place. It seems, that these first essays were made in the open air: but there being some appearance of attention, a room was hired, at the joint expence of some members of the neighbouring churches; and regular preaching commenced. Circumstances soon rendering it inconvenient for the ministers from Castle-Donington to carry on the undertaking, the church at Melbourn stept forwards to support it. Messrs. F. Smith and J. Smedley, assisted occasionally by Mr. Goddard, of Ilkiston, attended in rotation at the stated times of preaching, till the close of the following year. But, as the prospect of eventual success still appeared doubtful, the case was referred, at Christmas, 1790, to a Conference at Cauldwell. That meeting, unwilling to relinquish the attempt, engaged the churches at Castle-Donington and Ilkiston to furnish a supply of preachers, for a limited time. Their perseverance was crowned with success: several persons soon afterwards professing repentance and faith, and desiring to enjoy the privileges of church members. The subject was submitted to the consideration of the Conference at Smalley, July 5th. 1791; when it was thought most prudent, that the candidates should be formed into a distinct church, and not received as members of any adjacent society. Accordingly, Messrs. F. Smith, Thomas Pickering and J. Smedley visited Derby, Aug. 21st. 1791, and baptized nine persons, whom they formed into a church state. The ministers from Kegworth, Castle-Donington, Ilkiston and Melbourn united in maintaining

regular preaching on the Lord's-days, and a week-day-evening lecture once a fortnight. Their labour of love was not in vain : before the next Association the members had increased to twenty-three.

For several years, the cause continued to be thus supported, by the disinterested assistance of the neighbouring churches ; and it gradually extended. Preaching was introduced into Alvaston, a village about three miles from Derby, in a small meeting-house belonging to the Presbyterians ; and the attendance, at first, was encouraging. Before 1796, the members of this infant society had increased to forty. But it then began to decline. Difference of sentiment on doctrinal points arose among some of the leading persons, and disorderly conduct in others gave great occasion of offence. Several withdrew, and others were excluded ; so that, in 1799, the members had sunk to twenty-eight, the congregations had awfully decreased, and the society appeared to be hastening to a dissolution. The midland Conference, anxious to preserve the interest in so populous a town, took the subject into serious consideration ; and, judging that a constant and resident minister might be more successful than occasional supplies, they engaged Mr. James Taylor, of Queenshead, who had just left the Academy, to make the trial. He took up his residence at Derby in 1800. At that time there were thirty members.

During the whole of the period now under review, the general baptist church at *Ashford*, on the Peak, Derbyshire, stood a member of the New Connection. This ancient society was probably founded during the Protectorate of Cromwell.

At the close of the seventeenth century it appears to have been in a flourishing state, and extended over most of the neighbouring villages; but its principal stations were at Ashford, Wardlaw, Blackwell, Monsal Dale and Puttyhill.* Two burying-grounds then belonged to it; one at Ashford, and the other at Blackwell, five miles north-eastward. About that time, Mr. Samuel White and Mr. Mason, two very worthy members of this church, began to preach; and, for a long time, were diligently and successfully en-

* We have satisfactory evidence of the existence of a number of general baptist churches, in these parts of Derbyshire and the adjoining districts of Cheshire and Staffordshire; which, at the commencement of the seventeenth century, were in a flourishing state, held annual Associations amongst themselves, and appear to have cultivated a great degree of mutual harmony. We are sorry that we have not been able to obtain any authentic details of their transactions: but possibly this notice may bring some original documents to light. Their sentiments, on some of the most important points of doctrine, may be collected from the writings of Mr. Samuel Acton, of Nantwich, who was a leading man among these professors, and frequently appointed to preach at their Associations. But they are more clearly stated in an agreement which the church at Nantwich made with Mr. Isaac Kimber, when they engaged him to assist their pastor. After assigning their reasons for inviting him, and stipulating what salary they proposed to allow him, it proceeds to state that this contract is to continue "so long as he approves himself to be a studious and useful minister, by preaching sound doctrine twice every Lord's-day, in the place of the church's assembling: particularly maintaining, on all necessary occasions, according to the holy scripture, the divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, in which he subsisted as the only begotten of the Father before the world was; and that he is God, God over all, as the scripture saith: and will not at any time deny, nor assert the contrary, either in the course of his ministry or conversation. Also, the universal love of God to man—general redemption by Jesus Christ—the baptizing of believers only on their profession of faith—and the necessity of holiness to the end." This agreement is dated July 1st. 1724, and signed by Mr. Acton and twenty-eight others.

gaged in the sacred work. Mr. White was eminent for his abilities and piety, his affection for the cause of religion, and his zeal to promote it. As he was possessed of some property, he could devote great part of his time to his favourite object; and was in the constant habit of riding over the bleak mountains of the Peak, to distant places, to publish the glad tidings of salvation, or to transact the affairs of the churches. He died Oct. 17th. 1727, aged forty-seven years. Mr. Mason's exertions appear to have been more circumscribed, being chiefly confined to Blackwell and its vicinity.*

After their decease, the cause declined rapidly, and there was, for many years, a great interruption of social intercourse amongst the

* In 1701, the notorious *Titus Oates* presented this church with various books; amongst which were Poole's Annotations and Limborth's Body of Divinity, which are still preserved.—What connection this extraordinary man had with the society at Ashford cannot now be ascertained; and, as his character is well known this circumstance might have been passed over in silence, had not our most popular historians generally aggravated the list of his real or supposed crimes, by suggesting that he was an anabaptist. It may, therefore, be esteemed the part of candour, to state the facts: especially as there is great reason to believe that the professors with whom he was twice connected were general baptists.

He was, it is probable, the son of Mr. S. Oates, mentioned in the former part of this work, as the co-adjutor of Mr. T. Lamb of Coleman-street. In his youth, he had been a member of the baptist church in Pennington-street, under Mr. I. Lamb; but soon forsook them and went into the establishment. After a while, he professed to be converted to popery, went over to one of the catholic seminaries abroad, and some say entered into the order of the Jesuits. In the reign of Charles II. he returned to England, where for many years, he kept the nation in a state of great alarm with reports of dreadful plots to introduce popery. In the following reign, he was convicted on several charges of perjury; and most severely and ignominiously punished. He outlived the Revolution; and received a pension-

various branches of this extended society. Scattered in distant villages, with no shepherd to collect the rambling flock, and no public ordinances to draw them together, they grew strangers to each others' concerns; the bond of union was broken, and, at length, they nearly forgot each others' existence. In this state of apathy, Mr. Israel Cotton, pastor of the general baptist society in the Isle of Axholme, visited his friends on the Peak, of which country he was a native. Pitying their situation, he collected a few of them together and preached for them several times, at a house in Monsaldale. The appearance of things inspired him with hopes, that this drooping interest might yet be revived; and, on his return, calling on Mr. Jeffery of Gamston, he communicated to him the particulars of his visit.

of four hundred per annum from the court, till his death, in 1705. These particulars being well known to every reader of the English history, we need not enlarge. In the latter part of his life, he again sought fellowship with the society of which he had formerly been a member; but the character of his public life, made the leaders of that church extremely cautious in listening to his overtures. At length, overcome by the apparent penitence and humility of his conduct, and his earnest protestations of sincerity, they, after three years investigation, reluctantly admitted him, and for a short time, he was employed in the ministry. But it was soon too manifest, that his disposition for intrigue and love of mischief retained their full power over him; and, after causing much confusion and distress, he was finally excluded from the communion of the church. He endeavoured to revenge himself for this step by involving a principal member in prosecutions, &c. but his cruel designs were ultimately defeated.—It was certainly no honour for any body of christians to be connected with Titus Oates; but whatever infamy attaches to the baptists on this account must be shared by the churches of England and Rome of which he was a member much longer than he was with them, and which do not appear to have proceeded with such cautious jealousy in receiving him as the baptists did. *Hume's Hist. of England*, chap. lxvii. and lxx. *Crosby's Baptists Vol. III. pp. 164—182.*

That zealous minister was much affected with the relation ; and determined to take a journey to the Peak himself. He accordingly went ; and his reception was such as encouraged him to persevere. Though Ashford is forty miles from Gamston, he and his worthy colleague, Mr. Dossey, agreed to pay this neglected people a monthly visit. They went alternately, without any remuneration ; and if indisposition prevented either of them from taking his turn, he defrayed the expences of his friend, who went in his stead.

These disinterested exertions were crowned with success. The friends of the cause were collected, and some attention excited among the neighbours ; but they had no place of worship. Their kind patrons, however, generously resolved to complete their undertaking. A piece of ground was purchased, adjoining to the burying-ground in Ashford-lane, nearly a mile from the town : a situation chosen probably for the accommodation of the friends who dwelt in the adjacent villages. On this ground, a small meeting-house was erected, almost wholly at the expence of Messrs. Jeffery and Dossey : the former advancing, in the first instance, thirty pounds ; and the latter, forty. Mr. Jeffery had the pulpit and pews prepared in the neighbourhood of Gamston, and employed his own waggon in conveying all the materials to the building. The edifice was soon finished, and, in 1761, opened by Mr. Boyce. In order to crown the whole, Mr. Jeffery purchased three acres of land, which lay contiguous to the meeting-house, and built a dwelling-house ; which he designed for the accommodation of the minister.

Mr. Jeffery having given such unequivocal proofs of his regard for this society, was desired to procure a suitable person to become their re-

gular minister. He recommended to their choice Mr. Benjamin Fox, a member of Gamston church, who removed to them before the chapel was fully completed. He confined his stated labours to Ashford ; but the congregations continued to be small. After an experiment of five years, he relinquished all hopes of being useful, and returned to his former connections. He was succeeded by Mr. William Kelsey, who probably came from Lincolnshire, and settled at Ashford, about 1766. But his talents were not popular, and his success was discouraging. After labouring here for twelve years, and observing the cause decline under his care, he removed to Knipton. His departure accelerated the decay which had been gradually advancing during the whole period of his ministry ; and the total dissolution of the society appeared to be rapidly approaching.

In this extremity, the remaining friends of the cause applied for assistance to the New Connection ; and were visited by several ministers from Yorkshire and the midland counties. Desirous of saving this sinking interest, a plan was formed for affording it a regular supply ; which began to be executed in 1779. A minister visited them once a month, and remained with them as long as circumstances rendered it convenient : sometimes two or three Lord's-days ; but frequently no more than one. In 1782, this society, which then consisted of only ten members, was admitted into the New Connection. In the following year, the members increased to fifteen. Regular preaching was then maintained at Ashford and Wardlaw, and the attendance was as numerous as could be expected. On those Lord's-days when no minister was present, the members

met as usual; and endeavoured to fill up the time by singing, prayer, and reading the scriptures, or occasionally a sermon.

The distance of this small society from those churches which furnished its ministerial supplies, rendered it highly desirable to all parties, that it should have a resident preacher. In 1786, an attempt was made to obtain the removal of Mr. John Taylor from Queenshead to Ashford. This minister had paid them an annual visit for many preceding years, and evinced himself their sincere friend. They had, therefore, formed an affectionate attachment to him; and proposed the subject to the Association, in 1787: but that meeting was decidedly against Mr. Taylor's compliance with their wishes. In the following year, Mr. W. Pickering, who had lately been called to the ministry by the church at Castle-Donington, visited Ashford; where his labours were acceptable and useful: five persons being baptized in the course of the year. They therefore invited him to settle amongst them; which he did in 1789, and became their regular minister. Symptoms of a revival continued to appear. Preaching was regularly maintained, not only at the meeting-house, but also at Wardlaw. A room was licensed in the town of Ashford, in which weekly lectures were delivered: and a door opening for introducing their cause at Bradwell, a populous village, eight miles to the north of Ashford, the opportunity was promptly seized. For some time, Mr. Pickering preached on the evening of the Lord's day, in the place of worship belonging to the methodists at Bradwell, and the hearers were numerous. It soon became necessary to leave this place and look for another, and a large barn was procured; where many attended with

apparent seriousness. The barn however was likely soon to be wanted ; and it was deemed expedient to attempt to raise a meeting-house. A piece of ground, in an eligible situation, was soon obtained, and a small building erected ; which was opened, Oct. 1790. For a time, the prospect was encouraging, the hearers numerous and several appeared to receive the word with joy, Many attended the means of grace at Bradwell from Abney, a village two miles distance ; and preaching was soon after introduced into that place, with sanguine expectations of success. But, after persevering in the attempt for many years, these expectations were, in a great measure disappointed ; probably owing to the distance of Mr. Pickering's residence from the scene of his labour.

For a long series of years, the members of this society had never enjoyed the privilege of sitting down at the Lord's table, except when they were favoured with the occasional presence of the pastor of a sister church. They felt and lamented their loss in this respect, and began earnestly to wish for more regular returns of these solemn opportunities : but they never imagined, that an unordained preacher ought to administer that sacred ordinance. They therefore all united in an earnest and affectionate invitation to Mr. Pickering to become their pastor. After much deliberation and prayer for divine direction, he consented to their request, and the ordination took place, April 6th. 1794. As the members of this church were few and poor, and could not support the expence of inviting several ministers to assist on this occasion: and, as both the people and their pastor were much attached to Mr. John Taylor, they had invited him to undertake the

whole of the sacred work : and, after consulting several experienced brethren in the ministry, he had yielded to their importunity. He therefore conducted the whole of the services : delivered a long introductory discourse, offered all the prayers, put the questions to the church and minister, received the confession of faith, gave the charge to the pastor, from 2 Tim. iv. 5, and addressed the people, from Luke iii. 14.—“ Perhaps few services of this kind,” says an eye-witness of the interesting transaction, “ have been conducted with greater solemnity, punctuality, affection and fidelity.”

The cause appeared to revive much after this union had taken place. In 1796, eighteen persons were added to the church by baptism, and the number of members increased to forty-three. But this appears to have been only a transient gleam, and the clouds quickly returned. Disputes among themselves, and the disorderly conduct of too many of the members, soon reduced their numbers, and thinned their congregations, especially at Bradwell. In 1800, the members were reduced to twenty-three, “ religion appeared at a stand, and the prospect was gloomy.” This gloom was increased, by the loss of their pastor ; who, this year, accepted an invitation to Ilkiston, and left Ashford, Aug. 14th.

We close this section by observing, that, notwithstanding several partial depressions, the general baptist cause, in the midland counties, had made great progress during this second period. In 1785, there were twelve churches, consisting of scarcely one thousand, six hundred members ; but, in 1800, the churches had increased to twenty two, and the members to two thousand six hun-

dred. How far real godliness and vital religion had kept pace with this external prosperity, the reader will form his own opinion, from the details we have presented to his consideration.

SECT. 2.—*The Transactions of the General Baptist Churches in the Northern District, during the Second Fifteen Years after the Formation of the New Connection.*

WE left the church at *Birchcliff* in a state of progressive improvement,* under the care of Mr. J. Sutcliffe. The congregation continued to increase: and, in a few years, it was found necessary to consider how they could be accommodated; the old meeting-house having become much too small. Some of the friends, disliking the lonely situation of the original building, thought that the cause might be benefited by pulling it down, and erecting another, in the neighbourhood either of Heptonstall or Hebdenbridge; while others warmly disapproved of a change of place. As they could not agree, they proposed the subject to the Association, in 1792; which advised them to defer building till they were more unanimous in their views. They soon after laid aside the scheme of removing, and provided for the increased congregation, by taking down the gallery of their old meeting-house, which was narrow and only in front; and erecting a spacious one, on three sides of the building. This was completed in 1793, at an expence of upwards of one hundred pounds.

* Supra p. 182.

But the cause does not appear to have advanced much for several years after this alteration. For, though they were well attended with hearers, the members gradually decreased, and they complain of the low state of vital religion amongst them. This probably was partly caused by the weak state of Mr. Sutcliffe's health. For several years he had been subject to transient fits, which sometimes seized him in the pulpit; but, as they lasted only a few minutes, he usually resumed his discourse without much apparent confusion. Towards the close of this period, he was afflicted with a fever, which continued for a week, and then seemed considerably abated; when, he was unexpectedly seized with a fit, that held him much longer than usual; and, after that, with a second, in which he expired, Oct. 4th. 1799, at about fifty years of age. He was an useful minister. His abilities, indeed, were not of the superior order; but he delighted in the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel, was a pious meek christian, and animated, in a high degree, with compassion for the souls of men.

This affecting stroke left the society destitute; and, for a few weeks, they were supplied from the neighbouring churches. Among those who visited them, was Mr. A. Barker, whose manner of preaching and address pleased them so well, that they very soon gave him an invitation to be their regular minister. This invitation he as promptly accepted: and, for some time, every thing seemed to prosper. But we shall have occasion to observe, in the next chapter, that these hasty measures laid the foundation of lasting repentance. In 1800, the number of members in this church amounted to sixty-three.

We have seen, in the last chapter,* that, by the exertions of Mr. D. Taylor and his fellow-labourers, the gospel had been introduced, and a meeting-house built, at *Shore*. The friends there were considered as members of Birchcliff church, till about 1795; when they became a distinct society: seven or eight persons being dismissed from the parent church to form it. Previous to this division, John Stansfield, a man fearing God above many, had preached regularly at Shore, till he was removed by death. After his decease, John Spencer settled with this people, and became their regular minister. He continued to serve them till long after the close of this period; but the progress of religion appears to have been slow. In 1800, there were but nine members; and some of these few were “verging towards a lukewarm state.”

The low condition of religion at *Queenshead*, which was noticed at the conclusion of the last period,† continued for several years. Disorderly conduct in some professors, want of zeal, a disposition to magnify the failings of their brethren, temporal distress, and various other causes, prevented the progress of the truth, and grieved the hearts of its real friends. Some valuable members were taken away by death, and others removed their dwellings to a distance. Their places were not supplied by new converts: for no more than twenty persons were baptized in the course of eleven years. The frequent attempts, which about this time were made by other churches, to induce the pastor, Mr. J. Taylor, to remove, tended still further to depress the minds

* Supra p. 179.

† Supra, p. 183.

of this people, and excited their fears, lest they should ultimately lose him.* Yet, in 1786, in the midst of this despondency, they exerted themselves, and erected a dwelling-house adjoining the meeting, for the accommodation of the minister and his family.

A heavy debt which, for many years, had been a weight on the cause, tended probably to increase this gloom. In the autumn of 1791, twenty pounds of this was demanded. As these poor people were utterly unable to raise this sum amongst themselves, they determined to apply to the liberality of their neighbours. For this purpose, Mr. J. Taylor, attended sometimes by one of his friends and sometimes by another, traversed the adjacent towns with a petition, stating their case ; which was recommended by an independent and a presbyterian minister, and a clergyman. Though disappointed in their expectations from some of the principal towns, they collected, exclusive of their expences, about sixty pounds. Several churches in Leicestershire and Lincolnshire hearing of their necessity, kindly lent their assistance, and raised the amount to near ninety pounds. This was a great relief to the interest at Queenshead : and, from that time, it has continued to revive. But this relief was purchased at a heavy expence by the pastor. The fatigues of so many journeys, during the winter season, were thought by many to have laid the foundation of that debility which has so much diminished the usefulness and happiness of his declining years.

* In the course of three years, the churches at Ashford, Halifax, Longford and Gosberton all applied, and some of them repeatedly, for the removal of Mr. J. Taylor to them.

Through all these discouraging times, the congregations, considering the situation, had been numerous; and, it was thought that the erection of a gallery would tend to render them more respectable. A part of the money collected in the preceding year, was therefore, in 1792, appropriated to this purpose, and a front gallery erected; which was opened, June 24th, by a discourse from Cant. vii. 5.

After the erection of the gallery, the congregation increased; but there appeared to be little good done in the conversion of sinners. The minister's ability for exertion regularly diminished. In 1795, while attending the Association at Nottingham, he suddenly lost the use of one eye; and nothing but the strictest attention, in the opinion of the faculty, could preserve him from total blindness. This prevented him from labouring in the neighbourhood, as he had hitherto done. Several young preachers, indeed, lent their cheerful assistance: but they could not fully supply his place; and their stay with their friends, after they were called to the ministry, was short. Mr. Ellis was dismissed to serve the church at Halifax, in 1793. In 1790, Mr. Joseph Binns was encouraged to preach; and, in the following year, he accepted an invitation from the church at Gosberton, Lincolnshire. In April, 1797, James Taylor, the younger son of the pastor, was called by the church to labour in the word: and preached, in different parts of the neighbourhood, more than thirty times before the close of that year. His zeal stirred up many to a greater concern for the prosperity of the cause: but he went to the Academy in London, Jan. 16th. following; and was the first student in that institution.

At the close of the period now under review, this part of the kingdom was involved in deep distress ; and the members of this society bore their full share of it. They addressed the Association in 1800, in this melancholy strain. “ The unparalleledly hard, dark, and dismal state of things, from the dearness of provisions and the dullness of the trade, makes it extremely hard for most of us to procure the necessities of life ; and impossible for some to do it. Several of our friends are already gone to the workhouse ; and more must probably shortly follow, or famish to death.” The number of members then was sixty-five.

We left the church at *Halifax* sunk in despondency for the loss of their pastor :* they were as sheep without a shepherd, and their hearts fainted within them. They, at length, roused themselves, and endeavoured to repair the breach which his departure had occasioned. Their thoughts were first directed to Mr. John Taylor, of Queenshead, and they proposed the subject to the Association, in 1787 ; but that meeting advised against his removal. Mr. Bentley, an occasional preacher at Hinckley, was next invited to assist them. He came ; but in two or three weeks left them. After several other ineffectual attempts, they wrote to Mr. W. Burgess, who had, for some time, exercised his gifts among the friends at Church-lane, London. He paid them a visit : and his labours were so well approved, that they invited him to settle among them. He accordingly removed with his family to Halifax, about the beginning of 1788. This event had a happy

* *Supra*, p. 192.

effect. The congregation increased in numbers and respectability; and several joined themselves to the society. The friends of the Redeemer were ready to indulge the hope, that his cause in this place, which had so long drooped, would, at length, revive and flourish.

But this flattering prospect soon vanished. It was found impossible, with their utmost exertions, to provide for the temporal necessities of Mr. Burgess and his family: and he was compelled to think of a change. While he was deliberating what step to take, he received an invitation from the old general baptist society at Fleet, in Lincolnshire; and left Halifax in April 1791. Being again destitute, they renewed their application to Mr. J. Taylor; but were still unsuccessful. They then turned their attention to Mr. Joseph Ellis, an occasional preacher in the church at Queenshead; who, after due probation, became their regular minister. He commenced his services probably towards the close of 1793; and, in the spring of 1796, was ordained to the pastoral office over this church. On that occasion, Mr. J. Taylor gave the charge to the minister, and Mr. J. Sutcliffe addressed the people.

After the ordination of Mr. Ellis, there appeared some symptoms of a revival; but dissensions among themselves checked the progress of the truth. In 1800, they reported, that religion was very low, and that their number was reduced to thirty-one.

Among the other places to which the Yorkshire ministers extended their occasional labours, was *Longwood*, a rambling village, five miles south of Halifax. In 1785, they made their first attempt there; and, after labouring a year, a

few persons joined them. A small society was formed, consisting, in 1789, of nineteen persons. Mr. John Booth, a worthy member of the church at Halifax who had long preached occasionally, took this infant cause under his care. Though already advanced in years, he generally walked to Longwood every Lord's-day morning, preached twice, and returned on foot to Halifax in the evening. This laborious service he continued for fifteen years, without any remuneration : and very seldom did the inclemency of the weather, the want of health, or any other reason induce him to disappoint his few poor friends. Sometimes, indeed, he exchanged with the pastor of a neighbouring church, in order that they might enjoy the ordinance of the Lord's supper.

The interest here had to struggle against many difficulties. They had no place of worship, except the dwelling houses of the friends which they frequently changed. There were some thoughts of building a meeting-house, on the waste ground adjoining the village, in 1790, and permission was obtained of the Lord of the manor ; but the Association advised them not to attempt it, in their low circumstances. The immoral conduct also of some of their members, tended to depress still lower this sinking interest. In 1791, they were under the painful necessity of excluding five of their small number ; and three others withdrew. For many years the hearers were very few, and the number in fellowship only eight or nine. Mr. Booth was frequently advised by his brethren in the ministry, and even by the Yorkshire Conference to give up the hopeless attempt ; but he seemed determined to persevere. About the close of the last century, the prospect seemed to brighten. The congre-

gation increased, and two persons joined the church. But the gloom soon returned. The extreme pressure of the times broke the spirits of the inhabitants, and fixed all their attention on their temporal distresses. The cause was evidently expiring: yet Mr. Booth, though now grown old, was unwilling to despair, and continued his visits. His attachment to the few sheep in that wilderness was so strong, that he seemed incapable of forsaking them.

At length, providence determined the case. Mr. Booth, in the beginning of 1804, had occasion to go to Leeds on business; and his horse, falling on him, broke his leg. This confined him for several months at home; and, during his absence, the few hearers and members at Longwood dispersed, and the cause sunk. Mr. Booth returned to the church at Halifax; of which he continued a honorable member till his death, in 1813. He is doubtless now receiving a full reward for his long and disinterested efforts to promote the cause of his Redeemer and the salvation of sinners at Longwood.

The church at *Burnley*, which was formed at the close of the last period,* continued, for a few years, to increase under the care of Mr. Folds. In 1787, it was thought proper to erect a meeting-house, which was accordingly constructed in Burnley-lane, about half a mile from the town. It is a compact and well finished building, with a gallery on two sides; and cost three hundred pounds; an expence much too great for the state of the church. The debt was long a heavy clog on the interest in that place, and a burden on

* Supra p. 194.

the Connection. In about two years after the opening of this meeting-house, Mr. Folds left them, in a disorderly manner, and went to Longford. This caused some confusion ; but Mr Edmund Whitaker, a lively, zealous and laborious young member of this church, who had lately been called to the work of the ministry, with the occasional assistance of Mr D. Laycock, another valuable brother, supplied the congregation with much acceptance, and contributed not a little to preserve the cause from dissolution.

Could Mr. Whitaker have continued to labour here, it is probable, that religion would have revived, as the congregation improved, and several were added to the church. But his temporal circumstances obliged him, in 1794, to accept an invitation from Melbourn. About this time, Mr. Folds returned, and, after some altercation, resumed the pastoral duties. The cause declined rapidly under his care ; and, in 1800, the state of religion was low, hearers few, and the members reduced to fifteen.

During the period under review, a circumstance occurred at Burnley which ought to be recorded. A young woman, the daughter of a wealthy farmer, being awakened to a sense of the importance of divine things, wished to attend the meetings of the general baptists where she had received the first serious impressions. This her father, who was attached to the established church, absolutely forbade. The young woman, determined to enjoy the privileges of the gospel, in Dec. 1789, left the paternal roof, and put herself under the protection of Mr. B. Robinson, a respectable member of Burnley church. Her father, learning the place of her

retreat, followed her; insisting on her return, and threatening her protector with a suit, if she did not. Mr. Robinson, thinking that to drive a person out of his house, who had voluntarily fled thither, for the sake of truth and a good conscience, would be unworthy of the character of a christian, resolved to permit her to remain if she chose it, and to take the consequences. The father, therefore, brought an action ; and, after a fruitless attempt to settle the matter by arbitration, Mr. Robinson received notice of a trial, at the ensuing summer assizes, at Lancaster.—Thither he went, with six other persons, besides his attorney : and, after spending a week there, the matter was determined by a rule of court, without trial. This rule ordered, that the young woman should return to her father's house ; but that she should be at full liberty to attend, on the Lord's-day, at what place of worship she pleased: and that her father might, if he thought proper, send a servant to attend her ; but that if he did not send one, she might go alone. Thus were the rights of conscience fully secured ; but the struggle cost Mr. Robinson nearly eighty pounds. He laid his case before the Association at Wisbeach, in 1791 ; and they recommended it to the churches to assist in reimbursing him ; but the contributions appear to have been slow and inadequate.

Thus we have glanced at the transactions of the general baptists in this part of the kingdom, during this period ; and we turn from them with a sigh. Notwithstanding all the exertions and prayers of the friends of religion, the cause, in these parts, evidently lost ground during these fifteen years. When their zealous founder, Mr.

D. Taylor left them, there were four churches, which, in 1786, comprised two hundred and thirty-five members; but in 1800, though there were six nominal societies, yet the whole number of members amounted only to one hundred and ninety-two. How far the loss of that active and judicious minister contributed to this unhappy decline may not be easy to ascertain: but that it was one cause cannot be doubted. It is pleasing, however, to anticipate a very different prospect in the next period.

SECT. 3.—*The History of the General Baptist Churches in Lincolnshire, during the Second Fifteen years after the Formation of the New Connection: or, from A.D. 1785, to A.D. 1800.*

WE now turn to the general baptist churches in Lincolnshire; but we are sorry that our accounts of them, during this period, must be very general: as we have not been able to procure the information, necessary to give a proper detail of their proceedings.

The church at *Boston* claims our first attention, which we left, in 1785, in a comfortable state.* This society continued to carry forward the cause of the Redeemer, with considerable harmony and success. Mr. Thompson, their worthy pastor, laboured diligently in his great work; and, in the first year of this period, ten were received into fellowship. But there is reason to fear, that some of the members did not sufficiently value their privileges. About that time

* *Supra p. 196.*

also, a party spirit was too prevalent among the professors of different denominations in the town, which led to disputes and angry contentions. This grieved the heart of their pious minister, hindered the conversion of sinners, and retarded the prosperity of religion. The internal peace of the church was, however, in a good degree preserved : and frequent additions were made to its members.

Towards the middle of this period, Mr. Thompson's health began to decline, and he was no longer capable of exerting himself to that degree which he had formerly done. For several years, his infirmities increased, and he was less able to labour in the ministry ; yet the congregations were numerous, and the cause prosperous. At length, he yielded to the stroke of death, Feb. 7th. 1794, in the fifty-ninth year of his age. At that solemn moment, he exhibited the efficacy of those doctrines which he had long laboured to propagate. These were his support in the near prospect of eternity, and enabled him to bear a dying testimony to the excellency of the gospel of Christ, as the only foundation of a sinner's hope ; and to express a comfortable assurance of his own interest in the promises which it contains. He was a worthy man, a pious christian, and a very respectable and useful minister, who had contributed much to the establishment and support of the New Connection. Mr. Burgess, of Fleet, preached his funeral sermon, from 2 Cor. xiii. 11 : and his ancient acquaintance and fellow-labourer, Mr. D. Taylor, paid a tribute of respect to his memory, by delivering a discourse, from the same text ; which he afterwards published, with the Memoirs of the Life and Character of his deceased Friend. In that work,

the author, who was well qualified from his long intimacy with this minister, thus describes him as a preacher. “It may be acknowledged, that Mr. Thompson’s natural abilities were not eminently great. They were indeed superior to those of many other ministers; but did not rise far above mediocrity. His excellency lay chiefly in employing them to the best purposes. Having by grace been made deeply acquainted with his own miserable condition as a sinner, and being impressed with the consideration of the worth of souls and the infinite importance of that salvation which is exhibited to man in the gospel, and having an ardent affection for the welfare of his fellow creatures, he did not trifle about unnecessary inquiries, and subtle disquisitions, respecting subjects not to be known, or of little use when known; but confined himself chiefly to those important doctrines and duties which are clearly revealed, and upon an attention to which our happiness for time and eternity depends.” “To this, and not to eminently superior abilities, it always appeared to me, that the success of his ministrations was to be ascribed.”* A hint, well deserving the serious regard of all who wish to be “wise to win souls.”

The death of Mr. Thompson was sincerely lamented by his affectionate people; yet they soon began to look about for a successor. For a time, Mr. Binns, who then laboured at Gosberton, supplied them, on the Lord’s-day mornings. When he went to Bourn, they applied to Mr. W. Pickering, of Ashford; but his church refused to consent to his removal. They next laid their

* D. Taylor’s Memoirs of Thompson, p. 79.

case before the Association ; and were recommended to Mr. J. Kingsford, of Barton, Kent : but it does not appear that this proposal had any effect. While these negotiations were pending, the churches in the midland counties generously endeavoured to furnish the friends at Boston with ministerial supplies : and, by their exertions, the cause was preserved from declining, and the minds of the hearers kept in a lively frame.— Amongst others who visited them, was Mr. W. Taylor, assistant minister at Birmingham. His character and talents being well approved, he was invited to become their pastor ; and was ordained, Mar. 22d. 1797 : when Mr. D. Taylor, of London, gave the charge.

After this settlement, the hearers increased and additions to the church were more frequent : yet, before the conclusion of this period, they complained “ of a decrease in their congregations, of several of the members going away to other denominations, and of trials of various kinds.”— The number in fellowship, in 1800, was eighty-six.

The church at *Maltby*, in 1785, was in a peaceable state ; but the health of Mr. Ingham, their pastor, had already begun to decline.* Throughout the whole of the succeeding period, he continued to grow more infirm and less able for the active duties of his station. The members, therefore, gradually diminished : for, as death and other causes thinned their ranks, few came forward to supply the vacancies. The hearers at Alsford also decreased, when Mr. Ingham was unable to visit them as frequently as he had for-

* *Supra*, p. 197.

merly done : and, though the congregation was still numerous at Maltby, yet the preaching of the word produced little effect. In 1796, the members had sunk to thirty, and the pastor was hastening to the grave. In two years afterwards, he exchanged a bed of languor and pain for that happy state, in which the inhabitants never say, "We are sick." In a few months after his decease, Mr. Trolley settled at Maltby, and became their regular preacher: and there appeared some symptoms of a revival. In 1800, the number of members was thirty-five : they complained, that "the name of Jesus was too little regarded among them ; and that they were by no means unanimous in the approbation of the means of grace which they then enjoyed."

Long-Sutton church had begun to decline at the conclusion of the last period. Of this the friends of the cause seem to have been conscious ; and a church-meeting was held, Mar. 25th. 1785, "to consider what could be done to promote the interest of Christ among them." It was then agreed to establish three distinct meetings for reading and expounding the scriptures and prayer: which were to be held at Tydd St. Gile's, Tydd St. Mary's, and Long Sutton. Proper persons were appointed to superintend and conduct them ; who were to keep a register of the members belonging to each meeting, and of their omissions of attendance, and to report quarterly to the pastor. At the same time, they recommended to their minister to open more clearly, in his preaching, the spirituality of the law; and to join with them in endeavouring to maintain a*

* Supra p. 198.

more regular discipline in the society. These laudable measures appear to have produced a good effect ; as, for several years, a few additions were made to their number.

But Mr. Poole, having read some of the writings of Mr. E. Winchester, embraced the peculiar sentiments of that author, and invited him to come and preach at Long-Sutton. This invitation Mr. Winchester promptly accepted ; and gained many proselytes. Difference of sentiment arose among the members, which produced disagreeable altercations ; and the progress of the cause was prevented. To put an end, as they hoped, to these mischievous contentions, it was resolved, Jan. 30th. 1791, "mutually to forbear with each other, and allow each other to think for himself in matters of divinity, without attempting to irritate each other's passions on the account of difference of sentiment." Seven brethren and six sisters agreed to unite with Mr. Poole on this broad basis.

This professed laxity of principle led to a still greater declension. From the denial of the eternity of future punishments, they proceeded to disown the divinity and atonement of the Saviour. Having thus renounced the distinguishing doctrines of the New Connection, they very consistently dropped all intercourse with it ; and silently withdrew from the union. Their last communication was addressed to the Association at Hinckley, in 1793 : when they reported, that they had experienced many troubles for some time past ; but then hoped to enjoy peace : and that their number was reduced to twelve.

Though the church at *Fleet* did not form a part of the New Connection, during this period, yet,

as it made various applications for admission, and ultimately became a branch of that union, it may be proper here to bring forwards its history to the close of the century.

When Mr. Poole left this society,* the necessities of the case induced them to encourage two of its members, Mr. Thomas Rusling and Mr. Thomas Melbourn, with the occasional assistance of neighbouring ministers, to supply the pulpit. The former was a person of limited abilities, and an inconstant disposition : the latter possessed strong intellectual powers ; and was a good speaker. They both indulged some notions bordering on mysticism ; being professed admirers of Jacob Behmen. They did not, however, long co-operate with cordiality. Mr. Rusling, conceiving that his colleague's services were preferred to his, took umbrage, laid aside the ministry, and soon after joined the quakers.—About the same time, Mr. Melbourn, for very different reasons, abruptly relinquished the sacred work, to which he had always shewn great reluctance.

Thus left destitute, the church invited Mr. Joseph Proud, who then resided at Wisbeach, to visit them as a supply ; and his labours being approved, he was encouraged to remove to Fleet. In a few years afterwards, he was ordained to the pastoral office ; and the cause prospered under his care : so that it was found necessary, in 1782, to enlarge the place of worship. Mr. Proud was a man of superior qualifications for the exercises of the pulpit : and, had his humility equalled his abilities, he might have been an eminent and useful minister of the gospel. But his haughti-

* Supra, p. 197.

ness of temper led him to take several steps which sunk him in the estimation of the friends. He introduced, by his own authority, the practice of congregational singing into the public worship of the church, though he was well aware that many of the members conscientiously disapproved of it. Discontents arose: and, as it usually happens, each party complained of the other. At length, in 1786, an opening presented at Norwich; and he suddenly left Fleet, without acquainting the church of his design.

Thus unexpectedly deprived of their pastor, the leading members endeavoured to supply the loss, by maintaining prayer-meetings, and reading sermons from valuable authors. They did not, however, neglect to look out for ministerial assistance; but soon turned their eyes to Mr. T. Pickering of Castle-Donington, who had spent some time with them as a supply. Approving his character and ministry, they requested him to settle with them; but, after much deliberation, he declined the proposal. They were then recommended to Mr. Prowitt, of Oxford, who paid them a visit; and his labours being satisfactory, they encouraged his expectations of being finally chosen as their regular minister. But, while this negociation was proceeding, Mr. T. Pickering informed the church, that those obstacles, which had induced him to refuse their request, were removed. This involved them in considerable difficulty: as most of the members preferred his labours to those of Mr. Prowitt; but several thought that matters had gone too far with the latter, to permit them honourably to draw back. The decision was, at length, referred to a ballot, which terminated in favour of Mr. Prowitt. He possessed a friendly temper and

great suavity of manners; but inclined too much to the tenets of the Socinians. Though, in his public discourses, he endeavoured to give no offence; yet there was a deficiency, with which his judicious hearers could not feel satisfaction. This produced a coolness on their part, which induced him to take a friendly leave of them, and remove to Newcastle; accompanied by the sincere esteem of his connections at Fleet.

At this time, Mr. Thomas Ewen, the son of a deacon of this church, had begun to exercise his gifts ; and, on Mr. Prowitt's recess, he and Mr. Thomas Fant, another member, were encouraged to supply the public services with preaching. Though grateful for this assistance, yet the society thought it proper to inquire for a person qualified to sustain the office of pastor over them; and were soon informed, that Mr. Burgess, of Halifax, had thoughts of leaving that station. A correspondence was, therefore, opened with that minister, which led to his settling among them. He arrived, with his family, at Fleet, April 14th. 1791.

The church, at this time, consisted of sixty-two members: but discipline appears to have been too much neglected: and the first attempt of Mr. Burgess was to revive it. A meeting was accordingly held, May 29th, to inquire into the state of the society, and to establish church-meetings ; which were afterwards regularly maintained. It was also resolved, to request Mr. Thompson, of Boston, and Mr. Freeston, of Wisbeach, to attend once in two months, to administer the ordinance of the Lord's supper. The imposition of hands, which had hitherto been held necessary to communion with this church, was, likewise, Jan. 22d. 1792, left to the option of each candidate. Mean-

time, the labours of Mr. Burgess grew daily more acceptable and useful; and his character more esteemed. In the following May, the friends gave him an unanimous call to the pastoral office, which he accepted: and, Jan. 2d. 1793, he was ordained; when Mr. Thompson gave the charge to the minister, from 1 Tim. iv. 6; and Mr. Birley, of St. Ive's, addressed the people, from Luke iii. 10.

As Mr. Burgess had been uniformly united with the New Connection, it was natural for him to wish that the church, over which he presided, should become a member of that body. At the following Association, therefore, they applied for admission. In stating their religious views, they candidly acknowledged that some of them held the doctrine of universal restoration. On this account, the church at Melbourn voted against their admission; and the subject was referred to the Association in 1794. When they renewed their application to that meeting, seven or eight other churches joined the opposition; and the conclusion was again postponed. The church at Fleet, therefore, declined making any further overtures, and resumed their connection with the Lincolnshire Association.

During some following years, the progress of the cause was retarded, by personal disputes, which had been long agitated between several of the principal members; and, in too many instances, by the inconsistent conduct of others. Yet an encouraging progress was made; and the labours of Mr. Burgess, both public and private, were highly approved and blest. The congregations increased in number and respectability; and the society in members. No fewer than sixty-four persons were added to the church, in

the interval from the time when Mr. Burgess settled at Fleet to the close of the year 1800.

At the conclusion of the former period, the ancient general baptist society at *Killingholm* appeared, by the blessing of God on the exertions and care of Mr. J. Hannath, its laborious pastor, to be reviving from a state of deep declension.* And, though there arose a diversity of sentiment, at that time, which operated unfavourably on the minds of several friends ; yet it appears to have quickly subsided : for, in 1787, they were unanimous, and had introduced preaching into two neighbouring places, Halton and Immingham. For several years, the congregations were numerous ; and additions to the church frequent. The increase of the cause made it necessary to enlarge the place of worship: which accordingly was taken down ; and a new and more spacious one erected in its place. This was opened, Nov. 10th. 1792: when Mr. Scott, of Retford, preached, in the morning, from Hag. ii. 9 ; and Mr. Beatson, a particular baptist minister from Hull, in the afternoon, from John iv. 23, 24.

It is probable, that these ministers took this opportunity to state and enforce their opposite views on some important points of doctrine : as, from this time, there arose a difference of sentiment amongst the members, which produced the most unhappy effects. One party adhered to their ancient principles, respecting the extent of the Saviour's atonement ; and the other espoused the calvinistic views on that question. The debates ran high. A young man, who had lately been called to the ministry, warmly advocated

* *Supra*, p. 201.

the new tenets : and Mr. Hannath, then eighty years old, was less capable of defending the truth, or convincing gainsayers. Yet, notwithstanding these disputes, the cause prospered. In 1796, thirty-eight persons were added to the church by baptism ; and the members increased to seventy-seven..

But, in that year, the contentions, which had so long distracted this society, broke out into an open rupture. About thirty of the members persevered in the principles of the general baptists, and adhered to their venerable pastor ; but the rest, forming themselves into a distinct society, invited a particular baptist minister to settle with them. Considerable discussion and uneasiness arose, respecting the property of the church, and the possession of the meeting-house. The one party claimed it as the supporters of the doctrines for the promotion of which it was originally intended: their opponents, however, having several trustees among them, and being the majority, kept possession of part of the land. By a kind of compromise, it was also at length agreed, that the meeting house should be enjoyed in common ; the seceders occupying it, on the morning of the Lord's-days; and the general baptists, in the afternoon.

Though the latter were reduced in numbers, they did not despond. They appear to have had several, amongst themselves, who assisted in preaching, with considerable approbation: especially Mr. Joseph Wieles, who was also a very useful and active deacon, and Mr. Edward Hunter, of Clixby. They were zealous to support and propagate what they esteemed to be the truth : but the age of their pastor, and the number of places at which they maintained regular

preaching, made it highly desirable to obtain further assistance. They, therefore, in 1798, invited Mr. W. Smedley, the son of Mr. J. Smedley, of Gamston, who had been called to the work of the ministry, to come over and help them. The labours of this young man were blest : the hearers increased ; many were added to the church ; and the word of life was carried into new places. At this time, they preached regularly at Killingholm, Ulesby, Halton, Habrough, Limber, Keelby, Asby, Binbrook and Clixby ; besides occasionally visiting several other places.

While these exertions were making to spread the kingdom of the Redeemer, their venerable pastor, Mr. J. Hannath, was called to his reward. He died March 19th. 1799, at the advanced age of eighty-seven, and was buried in the ground belonging to the meeting-house. But so strong was the prejudice of the parties against each other, that Mr. E. Hunter, whom the deceased had requested to preach his funeral sermon, was prevented from occupying the meeting-house, and obliged to perform that last office of respect in his own house, at Clixby. The text was Phil. iii. 20, 21. Mr. Hannath appears to have been an active and useful minister ; and a hearty friend to the general baptist cause. By his persevering exertion it was restored to a good degree of prosperity, in a situation, which, by its distance from other churches of the same denomination, precluded him from that assistance and support, which many of his fellow labourers enjoyed.

Mr. Smedley attended the Lincolnshire Conference, Sept. 27th. 1798 ; and expressed a strong desire that, for the advantage of the cause at Killingholm, the meetings of the Conferences

might be extended to that village: but its distance was thought to render such a measure impracticable. The brethren then assembled advised the churches in the north of Lincolnshire to form a distinct conference among themselves; and promised that some of their ministers should occasionally attend it. The general baptist churches in those parts were not, however, sufficiently strong to carry such a design into effect.

In the commencement of 1800, Mr. Smedley left Killingholme to pursue his studies, at the newly-formed academy, under Mr. D. Taylor. On his departure, the church applied to Mr. W. Atterby, the pastor of the society at Kirton in Lindsey, who removed with his family to Killingholme, March 8th. 1800. At the following Association, it was stated that his labours were well attended, and would, it was hoped, be rendered a blessing. This church then consisted of fifty-two members.

The general baptists at *Gosberton* were, at first, as has been already noticed, considered as members of the church at Spalding. Previous to the conclusion of the seventeenth century, it is certain that many of the members of that society dwelt here, and that regular public worship was maintained in this place: and, if we may judge from the share of the property of the church assigned to it, the interest here was esteemed of great importance.* In the former part of the eighteenth century, this branch of the society appears to

* This was four acres of land which lay in Weston, a village about four miles east of Spalding; purchased, as the Fleet church book informs us, by a Donation from John Rutton. The rent was divided into seven equal parts: of these Spalding had two parts; Bourn and Hackenby, two: Gosberton, two; and

have flourished, under the care of Mr. Roberts; a minister of respectability and talents, who died about 1724.* From that date, for nearly forty years, we have not been able to obtain any information respecting the progress of religion at Gosberton; except that, during that interval, the connection with Spalding was preserved, although, from various circumstances, it continued to grow less intimate; and that, owing rather to the decline of the parent society than to its own prosperity, it is probable that it was often in a better state than the interest at Spalding.

We hear of no other pastor of this society, till Mr. Joseph Anderson took the oversight of it; who was ordained, Oct. 31st. 1762. He was then in the prime of life; and appears to have been an active and laborious minister. We find him constant in his attendance at the Lincolnshire Association; and frequently appointed to preach at their meetings. Yet his labours do not seem to have been very successful at Gosberton: for, in 1771, the members in fellowship were only twenty-six, though those who dwelt at Spalding were probably included in the account; and, in two years afterwards, they had sunk to eighteen. But a pleasing revival then took place. The pastor rose high in the estimation both of his religious connections and of the neighbourhood at large: and, in 1781, the number of members increased to thirty-six. In the spring of that year, he was affected with a cold; and, before he was perfectly recovered, had occasion to assist the general

Fleet one. The earliest receipt for this rent is in 1704: and the first that specifies the distribution of it in the above proportion, is dated January 1st. 1709.

* Supra, Vol. I. pp. 216, 217, 317. Vol. II. pp. 115, 119.

baptists at Burgh and Monksthorpe, who were then destitute of a pastor. While engaged in conducting the worship of God, he was suddenly seized with indisposition, and conveyed from the pulpit to the house of his friend, Mr. Hursthause, of Croft. After languishing a week, he died April 1st. 1781. Mr. W. Thompson, of Boston, preached his funeral sermon, from Acts xx. 38. A widow and six children were left to deplore their loss.

After the death of Mr. Anderson, Mr. Fant, of Swineshead, supplied the pulpit; and, for a short time, the cause continued to prosper. In 1782, the number of members was forty. But a sad reverse followed. In the following year, they addressed the Association of the New Connection, at Nottingham, stating their "distressed situation, for want of a pastor, ordinances and discipline; and their desire to join the New Connection." That meeting advised them to take the usual methods for gaining admission into the union; and requested Mr. Thompson, of Boston, "to visit and assist them, in the order and discipline of the church, and to administer the Lord's supper among them, when he could make it convenient." At the following Association, Gosberton church was placed in the list of the New Connection; and immediately applied for assistance in liquidating a debt which lay heavy on an individual.*

In 1787, the state of religion still continued discouraging: they complained of a want of the ordinances, and earnestly desired, that the visits

* This debt amounted to sixty pounds, and appears to have been contracted by building or repairing a meeting-house: but no particulars of any such event have yet reached us.

of Mr. Thompson might be more frequent. At this time, there arose a misunderstanding between the societies at Gosberton and Spalding. The brethren at the latter place, had encouraged Mr. Rusling to preach, contrary to the opinion of the friends at Gosberton. Mr. Rusling had formerly been an occasional preacher at Fleet; and, removing to Gosberton, had, for a short time, assisted them. But taking some offence, he left their communion and joined the quakers; with whom he continued six years. Those cautious people not encouraging him as he expected, to become a public speaker amongst them, he turned round again; and, leaving the quakers, joined the general baptists at Spalding. There being then a great need of ministerial assistance in that congregation, Mr. Rusling soon began to employ himself in preaching. His earnestness and zeal gained him many partizans, whom he inspired with an impetuosity like his own. In their eagerness to push him forwards, they attempted to intrude his services on the friends at Gosberton. Those more judicious christians, however, totally disapproving of the whole of the proceedings, laid the case before the Association, at London, 1787; and were advised to endeavour to bring the people at Spalding to repentance; and, if they failed in that attempt, to withdraw from them. As might be expected, from the temper by which Mr. Rusling's friends were then governed, they could not be brought to repentance; and the union between the two congregations, which had subsisted, nominally at least, for upwards of a century, was dissolved. Probably the omission of the names of the members at Spalding, who had formerly been reckoned as belonging to Gosberton, contributed to reduce

their number to fourteen ; as it stands in the Minutes of this year.

Thus left to themselves, they felt the necessity of obtaining a more regular and efficient supply, than Mr. Fant, from distance of abode and other circumstances, could afford them. They, therefore, turned their attention to Mr. John Taylor, of Queenshead, Yorkshire ; and made strenuous exertions to obtain his removal to Gosberton ; but the Association disapproving of the measure, they were finally unsuccessful. Being thus disappointed of their first object, they invited Mr. Joseph Binns, who had lately been called out as a preacher, by the church at Queenshead. In 1790, he arrived at Gosberton, and commenced his labours. The cause appeared to revive : hearers increased, and preaching was maintained at Swineshead-Fenhouses ; at which place many attended, and there was an encouraging prospect of usefulness. While Mr. Biuns was able to devote his undivided attention to this interest, it continued to improve. But, after the death of Mr. Thompson, he was employed one part of each Lord's-day in supplying Boston ; and, about the same time, his health declined so that he was unable to sustain the fatigue of preaching three times in the day. This proved injurious to the cause at Gosberton ; and caused a degree of dissatisfaction, which, joined to some temporal difficulties, induced him to listen to an overture from Bourn. He laid his case before his brethren at the Lincolnshire Conference, April 7th. 1795 : when, after a long and serious deliberation, that meeting approved of his removal. He therefore left Gosberton before the close of the year ; but the friends there still retain a grateful sense of his service while he resided with them.

The church applied to the following Association for advice, and were recommended to Mr. Yates, of Cauldwell; but he declined the proposal. They therefore depended, for a year, on the occasional assistance of neighbouring ministers; and were favoured, beyond their expectation, by the visits of Mr. W. Taylor, of Boston, and Mr. Wright, of Peterborough. They wished, however, for a more regular supply; and invited Mr. Briggs, of Sutton-Ashfield. He settled at Gosberton, in March, 1797: and his labours were acceptable. Soon after his arrival, two valuable members, Messrs. John Bartol and John Wilkinson, who had for six years officiated as deacons, were ordained to that office: and, in a short time, the former was called to assist in preaching. He was a man of great piety, and very edifying abilities; and, for some time, was very usefully employed by this society. In the succeeding year, Messrs. Joseph Anderson and J. Clarke began to preach occasionally. Thus plentifully supplied with labourers, they extended their exertions; and maintained regular public worship at four adjacent places. But Mr. Bartol, after much consultation, removed, in 1798, to take the charge of the church at Spalding; which was a great disadvantage to the cause at Gosberton. This loss was, however, in a great measure, supplied by the labours of the young preachers, and the diligence of Mr. J. Wilkinson, who held a weekly conference for reading the scriptures and religious conversation, which contributed much to the promotion of vital and experimental religion.

In the autumn of 1799, Mr. Briggs, being invited to Loughborough, left Gosberton: and the whole supply of the various stations devolved

upon the young ministers ; assisted occasionally by their neighbouring brethren. These means were, for a time, sufficiently acceptable to preserve the congregations from decreasing.—This church consisted, in 1800, of thirty-three members.

During the period now under review, a general baptist church arose at *Tydd St. Giles'*, a village in Cambridgeshire, half-way between Fleet and Wisbeach. Mr. John Smith, a deacon of the society in Long-Sutton, was called, in 1778, to exercise his gifts as a minister : but, as several of the friends seemed to doubt of his qualifications, he was not much encouraged. About 1782, he removed his residence to *Tydd St. Giles'*, and commenced preaching in his own house. At first, the hearers were few : but his serious and plain addresses gradually gained the attention of his neighbours, and reached their hearts. Five persons professing faith in Christ, were baptized by him, and admitted members of the church at Long-Sutton.

Many of the members of that church having, in 1788, embraced the tenets of Mr. Winchester, respecting universal restoration, Mr. Smith and his neighbours withdrew from their fellowship, and endeavoured separately to maintain the cause of truth. They accordingly formed themselves into a church, in Mr. Smith's house ; when Mr. Freeston, of Wisbeach, attended and administered the Lord's supper to them. The divine blessing crowned the weak attempt ; and, in a few years, several were added to their number. Mr. Smith's labours being increasingly useful, he was solicited by his friends to accept the office of pastor over the congregation, which he had been the instru-

ment of raising. He complied with their request, and was ordained, April 7th. 1795 : Mr. Burgess giving the charge, from Col. iv. 17 ; and Mr. Freeston addressing the people, from 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. At the same time, Messrs Wright and Burrell were ordained to the office of deacons.

As the hearers increased, it became desirable that they should be accommodated with a more spacious place of Worship. Mr. Smith, therefore, almost at his own expence, built a convenient little meeting-house and a dwelling-house; which he invested in trustees, for the use of the general baptists. Thus favoured, the cause gained ground. In 1796, this church was admitted into the New Connection ; when the number of members was fifteen.

In 1800, thirteen were baptized : and they hoped, that "the Lord was with them, and would soon add to them a few more." There were then twenty-eight persons in fellowship.

We have seen, in the former part of this history, that there was a society of general baptists at *Wisbeach*, in Cambridgeshire, during the protectorate of Cromwell;* and that, at Walpole-Bell, a hamlet within five miles of the former, a church was raised by Mr. Marham, which was under the care of Mr. R. Booth.† This, at the Revolution, consisted of about thirty members. It is highly probable, that, prior to the close of the seventeenth century, these two congregations united in one society ; which afterwards was denominated from the market-town rather than the hamlet. In the year 1697, these professors built a meeting-house, at *Wisbeach* ; which cost up-

* Supra, Vol. I. p. 138.

† Ibid, p. 224.

wards of one hundred and twenty pounds. At that time, Mr. Henry Place, a woollen-draper of that town, seems to have been a leading member of this society ; as he accommodated the church with the ground on which the meeting-house stands : but whether by gift or sale does not appear.

In the imperfect records of this society which have been preserved, we find the following entry, dated Nov. 26th, 1697. “ We, whose names are subscribed, living in or near Wisbeach, do hereby signify, that, as the Lord has been gracious to our souls in calling us by the gospel to the fellowship of the saints, and placed the bounds of our habitation near together ; so we do joyfully agree to incorporate ourselves together in one church state, and to be one people and holy, to manage and carry on the work of the Lord together.” This minute is signed by twenty-six persons. This passage does not, however, prove, that the church was then first formed ; as it was not unusual for the old general baptists, on solemn occasions, to “ renew their church covenant.” And it is probable, that this resolution was made when they met, either to unite in building their meeting-house, or at the opening of it. They were then without a pastor : Mr. Booth, who was “ a gifted brother,” thirty years before this date, being most probably dead.*

While thus as sheep without a shepherd, they were occasionally visited by the messengers of the churches ; one part of whose duty it was to assist and direct destitute congregations. One of these, Mr. Morriss, a minister of some eminence, while labouring among them, was seized

* Supra, Vol. I. p. 216.

with an indisposition, of which he died, Sept. 19, 1706, at the house of one of the members; and was interred in the meeting-house.*

In a few years after that event, they were favoured with a pastor: Mr. John Sharman being ordained to that important office, June 12th 1710. As we meet with his signature to the minutes of the church-meetings for several previous years, he seems to have been called to the ministry by this church. When he took the oversight of this society, there were about thirty-five members; and the cause prospered under his care: there being a list of above forty persons received into fellowship by baptism; most of whom appear to have been the fruits of his ministry. He died in February, 1723.

On the decease of Mr. Sharman, the friends wrote to the Lincolnshire Association, May 10th. following, requesting ministerial assistance: and Messrs. Isaacs and Locking were appointed, by that assembly, to visit them in the course of two months. At a subsequent meeting of the same body, Mr. Joseph Hooke was requested "to visit the brethren at Wisbeach as often as he could:" and that active minister took several journeys to serve them. They were also sometimes assisted by Mr. William Stangar, of Northamptonshire.

During the occasional visits of these messengers, the church had called one of their own members, Mr. William Fisher, to the sacred work; and, after he had laboured amongst them, with increasing acceptance, for several years, they invited him to take the oversight of them. He was ordained, June 5th. 1732; and continued pastor

* This was, probably, the Mr. F. Morrise mentioned by Crosby, Vol. III. p. 140.

of this congregation for fifteen years. The interest of religion, during his ministry, was nearly in the same state as it had been under his predecessors. He was removed by death, April 1st. 1747.

For almost ten years after the death of Mr. Fisher, this society continued in a widowed state; and experienced the usual effects of such a situation, in the decline of the church and congregation. This deeply affected those who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity: and they not only mourned over it in secret, but appointed a season of public humiliation on its account. This we learn from the following interesting record. "At our church-meeting, held Oct. 17th. 1753, after prayer, we have agreed to humble our souls before Almighty God, by a day of fasting and prayer, to be held in this meeting-house, to beg of the Lord to grant us the means of a minister to preach the gospel to us, the poor remains of our ancestors and church which were before us; that we also, by means of the ministry, may be taught in virtue, in wisdom, and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; and also to be edified one by another, provoking one another to love and good works."

For some time after this solemn supplication, they were deprived of the regular enjoyments of the ordinances of religion, and depended on the occasional assistance of Mr. John Goode, of Boston, who was then in the messenger's office. At length, the Lord heard their prayers, and granted them a pastor. His name was John Proud; and he came to them from Buckinghamshire. He was ordained in 1756, and presided over this congregation for many years; but the cause was never very flourishing under his ministry. As he ad-

vanced in life, he was rendered, in a good measure, incapable of the discharge of the important duties of his station, by the almost total decay both of his bodily and mental powers. Mr. H. Poole, the pastor of Long-Sutton church, who had settled in business at Wisbeach, frequently assisted him in his public labours: and, about 1767, Mr. Joseph Proud, his son, who afterwards became celebrated among the followers of Baron Swedenburgh, was called to exercise his gifts as a preacher. For a short time, he assisted his aged father; but soon removed to Knipton, in Leicestershire. These casual supplies tended, in some degree, to retard the decline of the congregation; but the interest continued to languish, till 1784, when Mr. John Proud ceased from his labours.

During the former part of the last century, this society had been intimately connected with the churches at March, Whittlesea, Peterborough and St. Ives'. This union was cherished; by maintaining, at stated periods, an association among themselves; but none of the records of its meetings have fallen under our notice. These congregations never appear to have been included in the Lincolnshire Association; as we find none of their ministers attending its meetings, till Mr. Joseph Proud; who, especially after his removal to Knipton, was regularly present, and took a leading part in the business.

On the decease of Mr. Proud, this church invited to their assistance Mr. Joseph Freeston, a member of the general baptist church at Loughborough; who had lately been called to the ministry. He arrived at Wisbeach, in March, 1783, and commenced his labours. As he had been constantly united with the New Connection, it was probable that he would feel a desire for

his new associates to become members of it. Indeed their inviting him to settle among them indicated a friendly disposition towards those with whom he had previously acted. Accordingly, they applied to the Association at Kirton, expressing their earnest desire to be included in the union. They were advised to write to the churches, in the usual way; and, at the next Association, at Boston, in 1785, were regularly admitted as members of the New Connection. Availing themselves immediately of their privilege, they presented a case to the meeting: stating the exceedingly low state of religion, and their desire to enjoy the ordinances more regularly: and requesting advice and assistance. The Association thought it would be most prudent for the friends to request Mr. Poole, who still resided at Wisbeach, to administer the Lord's-supper to them as often as it could be made convenient.

The effects of Mr. Freeston's labours were soon apparent, in the revival of the cause. Before the next year, they had introduced preaching into several neighbouring places, with an encouraging prospect of success: and the members then were thirty-two. Yet the disorderly conduct of some gave much trouble to the church; and the necessity of exclusion frequently occurred. Death also deprived them of several of their number; so that, in 1789, they were reduced to twenty-one. The congregations, notwithstanding, continued to be numerous, and their approbation of Mr. Freeston's ministry and character increased. It was, therefore, resolved to give him a call to the pastoral office. This he accepted; and was ordained, Sept. 1st. 1789: when Mr. Birley, of St. Ives', delivered the charge, from 1 Tim. iii. 1;

and Mr. W. Thompson addressed the church, from Psalm cxxxiii. 1.

A pleasing change soon appeared. The ordinances of the gospel were now regularly administered, and the value of the privileges of church fellowship began to be more justly appreciated. Before the next Association, fifteen were added to the church by baptism. Such an accession of strength animated them to more vigorous exertions; and the interest of the Redeemer continued to prosper. In 1796, the members had increased to fifty-eight: "the greatest part of whom were commendably active and zealous." They extended their care to promote the kingdom of the Redeemer in distant places; and greatly assisted and encouraged Mr. Thomas Ewen, in his successful exertions to revive the decayed general baptist church at March: and, for several years, their annual reports to the Association exhibit an increasing spirit of zeal for the glory of God, and affection for each other.

But, towards the close of this period, the aspect of affairs became more discouraging. Disputes arose in the church, and several withdrew from its communion. Mr. Freeston observed the distressing change with deep regret; and determined to accept the unanimous invitation of the church at Hinckley, to remove to them. He left Wisbeach in the summer of 1799. After his departure, Mr. Thomas Fant, one of their members, preached frequently; and they were occasionally assisted by the neighbouring ministers. But these supplies were precarious and unsatisfactory; and by no means adapted to uphold, much less to revive, the drooping cause. It continued to decline; and, in 1800, they gave this melancholy account of themselves. "The

state of religion is very low amongst us: several of our hearers having left us; and several of our members, we are sorry to say it, shew great indifference in attending to the means which we at present enjoy. Our members are now reduced to thirty-four."

During this period, the church at *St. Ives*, Huntingdonshire, became a member of the New Connection. This was an ancient society; and appears to be the remains of the flourishing interest at Fenstanton, Warboys, and the neighbouring places. It may, therefore, be proper here to sketch its history, from the date of our last accounts* to the close of the eighteenth century.

At the commencement of that century, we find this society without a pastor. October 8th. 1712, Mr. Thomas Clack was chosen elder; and Simon Martin and Robert Knightly elected to the office of deacons. At this time, the general baptists at Fenstanton, St. Ives', and Warboys acted together as one body: and, from an enumeration of the members, it appears, that the number in fellowship amounted to fifty-seven; which, in the course of six years, increased to eighty-nine. The catalogue has this title: "A List of the Names of all the Members belonging to the congregation at Fenstanton and Warboys, owning the universal love of God in Christ to all mankind, and falsely called anabaptists." This list was made in consequence of a renewal of the church covenant, at a meeting held Novem. 5th 1714, at which Mr. T. White, the messenger, presided; and "the church of Christ of baptized believers of Stanton and Warboys did unani-

* Supra, Vol. I. pp. 104, 146—162, 218—223, 326.

mously agree to hold together as one church, as formerly."

Of Mr. Clack we know nothing, except that "he was a good man, and died in the faith." As his name appears neither to the minutes of the meeting just mentioned, nor yet in the list of members, it is probable, that his death took place soon after his election to the eldership.

The general baptists in these parts were earnest, not only for their own prosperity, but also for the spread of what they esteemed to be the cause of truth. April 27th. 1716, a meeting was held at Fenstanton, which was attended by the ministers from several distant societies: as James Richardson, Henry Miller, John Sharman, and Richard Drinkwater: when it was agreed to hold an Association of "the churches of Wisbeach, Fenstanton, Willbrun, Fulborn, and any other congregations, of the same faith, who were of a willing mind." On this occasion, it was also resolved to keep the first Thursday in the ensuing May "as a day of fasting and prayer, to humble themselves on occasion of their own sins, and the sins of the nation; and to beg of God to send forth more labourers into his vineyard, both there and in other parts."

Though this society then had no pastor, yet they were supplied with several preachers, whose labours were blest to the increase of the cause. Lewis Audley, William Wood, John Cropper and John King were regularly employed in the sacred work, at the various stations at which preaching was regularly supported: and Simon Martin, their worthy deacon, was frequently engaged, not only in matters of discipline, but also in administering the ordinances. Mr. Richardson, the messenger, frequently visited them; and presided

at their meetings for discipline. In their zeal for the interest of the Redeemer, they occasionally sent messengers to places where the cause had declined, "to inquire what friends remained, and to stir them up to the discharge of their duty." For this purpose, Messrs. Audley and Martin were sent, in 1717, to Ellington; and, though the distance was nearly ten miles, they frequently repeated the visit. But, while thus careful for the welfare of others, they did not neglect their own edification. After several meetings on the subject, they elected Mr. John Cropper to the office of pastor over them; which he accepted, and was ordained, with solemn fasting and prayer, June 7th. 1720, by Mr. J. Richardson: and it was "a day of much comfort and satisfaction to all present." Mr. Cropper had long laboured acceptably amongst this people, as an assistant minister. He was, at this time, near fifty years of age; having been baptized, in his twenty-second year, at Spalding, Jan. 19th. 1694, by Luke Copeland, a deacon of that church.*

The elevation of Mr. Cropper to the eldership gave great offence to Mr. L. Audley, who probably thought himself entitled to that honour. He was intemperate in his expressions of disapprobation; and involved, both his own friends, and the messenger, who had presided at the ordination, in his censures. This obliged the church to call him before them for his disorderly conduct; and issued in his exclusion from their

* On this event, Mr. Cropper has observed—"It was, at that time, a hard frost and deep snow; and yet no harm ensued. God will be honoured in his own ways, and protect his servants in the obeying of his commands. Let none be afraid to venture into the water when the season is cold, lest they be laid in their graves before the weather be warm." W. C. B.

communion. Three years afterwards, an attempt was made to settle the differences, by referring them to the arbitration of several ministers from distant churches: but the violence of Mr. Audley's temper seems to have frustrated every proposal for reconciliation; and, for a time, widened the breach. It is pleasing, however, to find, annexed to his name, in the list of members, that "he died in the faith :" which renders it highly probable that he was re-admitted to fellowship.

The building which these christians occupied, as a place of worship at St. Ives', was originally a granary ; and the property of Jonathan Denne, who has been so often mentioned. In 1724, he assigned it to trustees, for the use of the baptists: and it became the principal meeting-house of the society, which afterwards assumed the denomination of the church at St. Ives'. An expence of nearly twenty pounds was incurred, by the transfer; which was immediately raised by a private subscription among the members.

The members of this church, attentive to the state of religion in other congregations as well as their own, observed Nov. 5th. 1725, as a day of solemn fasting and prayer, "to bewail the loss of the church, by the death of several ministers, who had been removed from them and other sister churches around them—to implore the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, that he would raise up such amongst them as might be useful to the churches—to lament their own great coldness and decay in christian zeal and piety—and to intreat God on account of such of their christian brethren as were in affliction." On this occasion, they again renewed their church covenant, and took an account of the members. This catalogue contains only fifty names ; but whether the number

had decreased, or the list was left unfinished, is uncertain: yet, when we consider the frequent additions during many preceding years, the latter is the more probable supposition.

In 1745, the cause of religion sustained a great loss, in the death of Mr. Simon Martin, who had, for more than thirty years, filled the office of deacon. Highly respected during his life, his removal was much lamented. It appears, that he sometimes assisted in the ministry, and frequently administered the ordinance of baptism. In less than two years after his decease, Mr. W. Janeway, another worthy friend, died; and bequeathed to trustess a perpetual annuity of six pounds, for the minister of this congregation; on condition of his preaching occasionally at Sutton, where the land lies on which this endowment is secured.

Mr. Cropper being rendered, by the infirmities of age, less capable of fulfilling the duties of his station than formerly, was assisted, by the friendly visits of Mr. Johnson, the messenger, and Mr. Mills, of March: both of whom frequently administered the ordinances in his stead. At length, he was called to his reward, Feb. 14th. 1752, in the eightieth year of his age. He had been an honourable and steady professor of religion for more than half a century; and an useful and respected pastor over this society for thirty-two years.

At the time of Mr. Cropper's death, the members were about fifty; but they appear to have been scattered in many distant places. Mr. H. Biggs was soon afterwards invited to preach regularly amongst them; and, in 1758, he was chosen elder: but, as only twenty-five members voted for him, it is probable that there existed a

difference of opinion respecting him. He was, therefore, never ordained; but continued his services till his death, May 23d. 1773. During this period, Mr. Mills, of March, and other neighbouring ministers, occasionally visited this people, and administered the Lord's-supper.—The opportunities, however, of enjoying that edifying ordinance occurred but seldom, and were thinly attended: meetings for prayer and discipline were almost totally laid aside; and the cause had so far declined, that, at the death of Mr. Biggs, there were only seventeen persons united in fellowship.

In this dark state, the few remaining friends of religion began to look about for a minister: and soon turned their eyes to Mr. George Birley. This young man was originally a member of the general baptist church at Ashford, Derbyshire; but, in 1765, removed, to assist Mr. Dan Taylor in his school: and joined with the church at Birchcliff. There he was called to the work of the ministry; and laboured occasionally for some time. In 1768, he engaged, in the same station, with the late Mr. John Ryland, who then kept a boarding-school at Northampton; and left Yorkshire. He continued still a member of the church at Birchcliff; and was frequently and acceptably employed in preaching to destitute congregations: especially at Moulton, Spratton, Burton-Latimer and Stony-Stratford. The friends at St. Ives', in a few weeks after the decease of Mr. H. Biggs, requested Mr. Birley to pay them a visit. This he did; and his labours being approved, the invitation was repeated: and, in a short time, it was agreed, that he should spend one Lord's-day in each month with them. The

intervals were occupied by Messrs. Proud, Payne, Mills and Barron.

This mode of supply continued for several years ; during the greatest part of which the friends at St. Ives' were earnest and unanimous in inviting Mr. Birley to settle amongst them. At length, he yielded to their intreaties ; and, in May, 1777, he took up his residence in that town. He immediately began to preach three times on the Lord's-day, in their meeting-house ; and frequently, in the surrounding villages, on the week-day evenings. Though some success crowned his labours, and a few were added to the church, yet there was too little attention paid to the public and private means of grace and edification. The members were, however, decided in wishing him to assume the pastoral office, and urging him to be ordained. In 1782, he consulted the Association at Melbourn, on the propriety of complying with their request : and was advised to be very faithful in his endeavours to awaken, in his friends, a sense of the necessity of practical godliness, joined to a diligent attention to the duties of church-members, and conscientious exertions for the cause of Christ ; and to defer his ordination till he saw that his exhortations produced some good effect. So slowly, however, was this object attained, that, two years afterwards, the Association recommended his removal to Longford. But things soon afterwards assumed a more promising aspect : and the people persisting in their importunity, he accepted their call to the pastoral office. He was ordained, Oct. 18th. 1786 : when his much esteemed friend, Mr. D. Taylor, of London, gave the charge, from Rom. i. 9 ; and Mr. Robert Robinson, of Cambridge, addressed the church, from Prov. xxvii. 10.

After having suffered a long privation of thirty four years, these christians now enjoyed the high privilege of a pastor of their own, and the regular participation of the ordinances of the gospel. They increased in numbers and in graces: and, in the following year, found it necessary to enlarge the meeting-house, which had become too small for the accommodation of the increasing congregations, especially on the Lord's-day evenings. In 1789, this church presented a request to the Association at Retford, to be admitted as a member of the New Connection: and, in the following year, was unanimously received. It then consisted of forty members, and maintained regular preaching at Fenstanton and Warboys; at both which places they were well attended, though not so well at St. Ives'. During the subsequent years, their reports contain many complaints of afflictions, lukewarmness, negligence, and disorderly conduct: but, at the same time, give us the pleasing information, that some of their friends were constant in their attendance on the means of grace, lively and happy in their souls, and really concerned for the revival of religion. In 1800, the members were stated at thirty-four; and they were well attended with hearers.

During the whole of the present period, and some part of the preceding, the ancient society of general baptists at *Kirton** in Lindsay, Lincoln-

* We have postponed our account of this church to the end of this section, which is certainly a little out of place, in hopes of obtaining some particulars of its former history; but all our endeavours for this purpose have proved ineffectual. Yet, rather than leave a chasm in the work, we have drawn together the few facts which follow; and beg our readers to pardon their paucity and incoherence.

shire, stood a member of the New Connection. It was probably gathered during the protectorate of Cromwell, or perhaps in the civil wars which preceded it. At the Revolution, the cause here appears to have been in a flourishing state. The members were zealous in promoting the interest of their Saviour, in the midst of violent opposition; and affectionately attached to each other. At that time, Mr. John Kelsey was their minister; a person of good natural abilities and great devotedness to the service of his Master. Notwithstanding the edicts against nonconformity, this good man continued publicly to preach the gospel and discharge the other duties of his station. For this fidelity, he was apprehended and imprisoned in Lincoln jail, where we find him in 1660. After some time, that prison being crowded with the victims of persecution, he was removed, with several others, to Nottingham. Hence he wrote to his people, Sept. 4th. 1663: and here he was confined, if the editor of his letters was rightly informed, till set at liberty by the indulgence granted to nonconformists, by James II. in 1687. If his account be accurate, this worthy minister languished in confinement seventeen years, deprived of the enjoyment of his friends and family; for he had a wife and several children, to whom he bore a tender attachment. After his release, he returned to Kirton, and resumed his labours.*

From this time, we have no information respecting this society, till the year 1781; when it con-

* Several Letters, written by Mr. Kelsey, during his imprisonment, were published by Aaron Jeffery, the greatest part of them in rhyme. Though these compositions do not place him in the first rank of poets, yet they contain pleasing evidence that he

sisted of upwards of forty members, and the public opportunities of worship were well attended with hearers. They were then destitute of a pastor; and appear not to have had even an occasional preacher amongst them. They earnestly solicited the Association to recommend to them a suitable minister; but that meeting could not find one at liberty. For several years, they dragged heavily forwards, and the cause declined; but, in 1787, Mr. Jonathan Scott, of Gamston, pitying their sinking state, went once a fortnight to supply them. A speedy revival was the effect of his friendship: the hearers increased; and in the following year fourteen were added by baptism. For two years, the prospect continued encouraging; but Mr. Scott then found it inconsistent with his other engagements to continue his visits

was a good man, and a sincere christian: humbly resigned to the will of God, and acknowledging him in all the dispensations of his providence. The following lines will exhibit at once the disposition of the writer and the style of the poetry.

“ I hope the more they punish me, that I shall grow more bold :
The furnace they provide for me, will make me finer gold.
My friends, my God will do me good, when they intend me harm :
They may suppose a prison cold ; but God can keep it warm.
They double my imprisonment, whate'er they mean thereby :
My God in it gives me content ; and then what loss have I ?
What if my God should suffer them, on me to have their will ;
And give me heav'n instead of earth ; I am no loser still.”

Tradition says, that his removal to Nottingham prison was the means of gathering a general baptist church in that town; which subsisted for more than a century. He seems to have anticipated such a result, in the following passage, in a Letter dated “ From my Prison-house at Nottingham, Sept. 4th. 1663 :

“ They blame my going up and down, and send me further still,
To speak the truth at Nottingham, and thus they got their will.
A wise and wonder-working God ! to make such use of those,
That they should help to spread his truth, who to his truth are
foes.”

so frequently. This produced a rapid decline in the cause; the congregations dwindled away, and the members, in 1794, had sunk to twenty-eight.

In 1797, they obtained a more regular supply of ministerial assistance in the labours of Mr. William Atterby, whom, in the following year, they called to the pastoral office over them. For a short time, this union appears to have been blest, and the interest began once again to revive. But, in 1800, divisions respecting some points of doctrine, which were esteemed important, arose amongst them; and led to the removal of Mr. Atterby to Killingholm. The church then consisted of forty-four members.

SECT. 4.—*The History of the General Baptist Churches in London, which were united with the New Connection: from A.D. 1785 to 1800.*

THE general baptists in *Church-lane, Whitechapel*, prospered greatly after Mr. D. Taylor settled with them. Mr. Brittain seldom preached after this period; but cheerfully resigned the pulpit to his younger colleague; whose labours were peculiarly acceptable to his hearers, and blest by his heavenly Master. The congregations soon became numerous; and the increase consisted chiefly of persons who had been accustomed to attend at the established church. Additions to the society were frequent: no fewer than twenty being admitted into fellowship, before April, 1786. Harmony and zeal animated the members; and, at the suggestion of their experienced minister, various regulations were

adopted, to promote the purity and order of the church. He was requested to deliver a discourse, once a quarter, on the duties of church members to each other; and, on August 1st. 1788, commenced a lecture to young people, which he continued annually till his death. This society having long maintained only an irregular and interrupted correspondence with the New Connection, determined, April 10th. 1786, to form a closer union with that body; and, since that year, it has never failed to send a representative to the Annual Association.

In 1791, a commodious baptistery was constructed in the meeting-house, at a considerable expence; which was raised by private subscription: and, during the following year, twenty-five persons, professing their faith in Christ, were baptized and added to the church. The cause continued to prosper; and the satisfaction of the people with the labours of Mr. Taylor to increase. In the annual reports to the Association, they bore repeated testimonies of their approbation. In 1792, they say, "We are amply fed with gospel truth," and, two years afterwards, "We with pleasure inform you, that the gospel is preached to us in its purity; and we pleasingly perceive, with increasing zeal, stimulating the hearers to external and internal holiness."—About this time the meeting-house was painted and repaired, at an expence of nearly fifty pounds, which were cheerfully contributed by the friends of the cause. It was re-opened, May 18th. 1794; after having been shut up for more than a month. During this interval, the congregation was kindly accommodated, on the Lord's-day evenings, at Mr. Booth's meeting-house, Prescot-street.

In the midst of this increasing success, their aged pastor, Mr. John Brittain, was called to his reward. Though he was confined to his room only a short time, yet, for several years, he had been unable to move without support and assistance. He died, Sept. 18th. 1794, at the advanced age of eighty-four years. For almost thirty-eight years, he had honourably sustained the office of pastor over this church; and had made great exertions to promote its interest. And, though after Mr. Taylor's settling in London, he had, in a good measure, stept aside from the public ministry, he retained to the last his regard to the cause, and his affection for the people. His remains were interred, Saturday, Sept. 26th., in the family vault which he had prepared; and, on the following day, his colleague preached his funeral sermon, to a crowded and affected audience, from Psalm lxxiii. 25, 26.

This event naturally brought under consideration the subject of imposition of hands on baptized believers, previous to their admission to the Lord's table; as Mr. Taylor did not believe it to be necessary. After various discussions, it was agreed, that this method should still be continued, as a decent and becoming mode of receiving church members, though not of divine authority: but, that if any candidate should conscientiously decline it, he should not, on that account, be refused admission to communion. With this arrangement, Mr. Taylor expressed his satisfaction: and this continues to be the practice of the church.

But various circumstances occurred soon afterwards, and broke the harmony which had so long distinguished the transactions of this society. Some expressed their dissatisfaction, that the

meeting-house, in the erection of which considerable public property had been sunk, had fallen into the hands of an individual : but the open and candid conduct of the proprietor, who voluntarily came forwards, and gave a full explanation of all the particulars, perfectly satisfied the church, both of the legality and equity of his claim. The enemies of peace were, therefore, for that time, disappointed. Other subjects of altercation, however, succeeded ; and the contentions were carried to such a height, that, in July, 1796, the pastor sent a letter to the church, proposing to resign his office amongst them. This caused a great sensation ; and it was feared, that a division would be the consequence. But, by the exertions of those who sought for peace, the breach was, in some degree, closed, and unanimity restored. At the request of the pastor, Jan. 3d. 1797, was observed as a day of fasting and prayer, to humble themselves for past imperfections, and to implore a blessing on their future proceedings.

The disorderly walk of many who stood as members caused much trouble and confusion ; by which the hands of those who really laboured for the prosperity of the cause were greatly weakened. Frequent exclusions became necessary ; but this painful measure had only a partial effect in preventing the neglect of the public ordinances of the gospel, which had risen to a distressing height. The finances of the society also became embarrassed ; and, although various plans were adopted to improve them, they were a constant source of disquietude ; and the income was with difficulty made adequate to the expenditure. Yet, under all these discouragements, the cause maintained a pleasing degree of prosperity : and,

in 1800, they state, "that they were moderately attended with hearers, and peaceable amongst themselves." The number in fellowship amounted to two hundred and eleven.

During this period, several members of this society were called to the work of the ministry : amongst whom were, Mr. W. Burgess, late pastor of Fleet church ; Mr. J. Smith, now settled at Tydd St. Giles ; and Mr. J. B. Shenston, who was for several years pastor of the church in Gravel-lane, now assembling in Great Suffolk-street, Southwark.

At the close of this period, Mr. D. Taylor, with the generous assistance of the friends of religion, erected a little meeting-house at Mile-End, which was opened June 12th. 1800 ; when Mr. D. Taylor, and Mr. Newman, of Oldford, were engaged.

At the close of the last period, we left the church which now assembles in *Great Suffolk-street*, in a low state, under the care of Mr. Rowcliff.* It then had a meeting-house in Duke-street ; and there Mr. Rowcliff continued to labour, though with little encouragement, till July 31st. 1796 ; when, in consequence of embracing calvinistic sentiments, he resigned the pastoral office over this society, and removed to Southampton. For a few years, the pulpit was occupied by various preachers, especially by a Mr. Tapp, who, for a short time, was a member of the society in Church-lane, Whitechapel. The cause regularly declined, and the church was hastening to a dissolution ; when their old friends at Church-lane again interposed their good offices. Mr. D. Tay-

* Supra, p. 209.

lor went occasionally to preach for them, and to assist them with his advice and countenance: and the students under his care were frequently engaged in supplying them. At length, Mr. J. B. Shenston, a member of Mr. Taylor's church, who had been lately called to the ministry, accepted their invitation to become their pastor. He was ordained, April 23d. 1799; when Mr. D. Taylor gave the charge, from Acts xx. 24; and Mr. E. Sexton, of Chesham, addressed the people, from Heb. xiii. 17.

In the low circumstances in which the cause here had been for so many previous years, the trust deeds of the meeting-house had been suffered to fall into private hands; and, through the neglect of renewing them in proper time, this society lost possession of their place of worship in Duke-street, soon after Mr. Shenston settled with them. The building was transformed into a hatter's warehouse; and the burying-ground, which was of a considerable size and well filled with tomb-stones, was quickly cleared of those monuments of nonconformity, and has since been covered with buildings.* Thus deprived of their ancient place of assembling, the few members of this society hired a place in Gravel-lane, in the same neighbourhood, which had belonged to a public-house; and fitted it up for a meeting-house. It was opened, April 11th. 1800, by Mr. D. Taylor, who preached from Amos vii. 12, "By whom shall Jacob rise; for he is small :" a passage well suited to the occasion.

* The meeting-house thus lost was built by Mr. Dobson, about 1760, on the scite of the original one; which was an ancient structure, erected, probably, about 1670; and is said to have been the place where the famous John Bunyan most usually preached when he was in London.—*Wilson, Vol. IV. p. 179.*

In the same year, this church renewed its correspondence with the New Connection, which had been suspended for nearly thirty years.—They sent a letter to the Association at Spalding, June 24th. 1800 : in which they state that their number of members was fourteen ; four of whom had been admitted during the preceding year.

SECT. 5.—*The Transactions of the New Connection, as a body, during the second Fifteen Years of its existence : or, from A.D. 1785 to A.D. 1800.*

THAT persevering advocate of union, Mr. Gilbert Boyce, though repeatedly frustrated in his attempts to reconcile the Lincolnshire Association and the churches composing the New Connection, still persisted in his efforts. In 1786, he brought the subject before the former meeting, when it was referred to the judgment of the churches, without exciting much attention. But, in the following year, it was resolved by the Association of the New Connection, held at London, that a friendly address with a copy of their Minutes should be presented to the general Assembly in Worship-street. This act of civility, which was probably repeated for some years, encouraged the good old man to hope, that one great obstacle to the re-union which he so much desired was removed. He therefore proposed a case to the Lincolnshire Association, held at Coningsby, May, 1789, inquiring, “Whether, as our brethren of the Leicestershire Association are now in connection with the general assembly in London,* with which we are also united, we

* Here the wishes of the good old man appear to have led

cannot unite with each other?" This question was referred to the churches, and the answers to it were directed to be sent to Mr. Boyce; but the result does not appear. Mr. Boyce however forwarded a proposal for re-union to the Association at Wisbeach, April, 1791; in consequence of which Mr. Thompson was directed to attend the Lincolnshire Association and receive their proposals. As that meeting was held in a few days afterwards, Mr. Thompson was probably unable to comply. But the subject was again introduced by Mr. Boyce, at the Coningsby Association, in the following June, when the representatives of the churches at Asterby, Coningsby, Spalding, and Fleet, voted in favour of the union; but the church at Monksthorpe, required time to consider of it. The same proposal was again alluded to in the next meeting of the same body; but as a conference was to be held, June 26th. 1792, to discuss it, it was thought improper then to enter upon it. We have no account of this conference, which seems to have been the final attempt to effect a reconciliation. Mr. Boyce, who had already reached his eightieth year, was removed by death soon afterwards, and the Lincolnshire Association did not long survive him.

In the beginning of this period, a measure was adopted, which, if it had succeeded, would have been of essential service to the whole union. In 1786, it was observed at the annual Association,

him into an error, as there never existed any correspondence between the General Assembly and the New Connection that could be called an *union*. The above present of the Minutes is all the sanction to any intercourse which the Records of the Association of the New Connection afford. It is probable that, during this period, a few ministers of the latter body did attend, as individuals, some of the meetings of the General Assembly.

that several small debts which remained on various churches, for building and repairing meeting-houses, not only retarded the prosperity of the cause in those societies; but also prevented them from affording prompt and effectual assistance in cases of general importance. In order to remedy this inconvenience, it was proposed to consolidate several of these trifling burthens into one sum, and to make a general effort to remove them, throughout the whole Connection. This plan, being referred to the consideration of the churches, was approved; and, the following year, the Association resolved to attempt its execution. The societies which were admitted to a share in this collection, were those at Harbury, Long-Sutton, Ilkiston, Shore, Queenshead, Halifax, and Birmingham; the amount of the incumbrances on which was about four hundred and fifty pounds. Mr. J. Deacon was requested to print a circular letter, stating and recommending the several cases: and certain ministers were nominated to collect for this object in the different districts: who were earnestly requested to complete the whole business before the following Association. At that Association, the returns were made: but it then appeared, that some churches refused to lend any assistance—that others could not attend to it till some future period—and that some of the ministers appointed to collect had not been able to make any attempt; while the exertions of others had been only partial and limited: so that not one hundred pounds had been procured. This small sum was divided amongst the societies which were included in the proposal, in proportion to their respective debts: and further efforts were strongly recommended. Yet it does not appear that much

more was done ; and the expected assistance was intercepted by that want of general co-operation which has, on many other occasions, injured the New Connection.

During this period, the Association was very laudably solicitous to procure proper books for the use of the churches. In 1790, a case was sent from the midland Conference, stating the necessity of a new Collection of Hymns for public worship : the former Collection, which had been published soon after the formation of the union, being very imperfect, and nearly out of print. The Association therefore appointed a committee to collect proper hymns; and, at their next meeting, directed a Hymn Book for social worship to be published, under the superintendance of a select committee. This was done in the course of the ensuing year.

The instruction of their youth in those principles of religion which they deemed scriptural and important, also occupied the frequent attention of the Association : and Mr. D. Taylor was repeatedly desired to publish new editions of his catechism. In 1792, at the request of this body, he added to the former contents of that useful manual, a section on the "Reasons for dissenting from established churches." In 1789, Mr. D. Taylor preached, before the Association at Retford, on the Inspiration of the Scripture. The discourse was much approved by his hearers ; and they unanimously requested its publication. It made its appearance, therefore, Aug. 1790, under the title of "An Essay on the Truth and Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures :" and was of singular service in preserving the churches from the snares of infidelity, which were then diligently spread on every side.

We have already observed, that the annual Association was, at the formation of the Connection, a conference of the officers of the several churches, who became members of it by virtue of their stations. During the period now under review, the nature of that assembly underwent a considerable though silent change. Some inconveniences were found to arise, from a seat in the Association being claimed on account of office: and, in 1795, it was declared, at the meeting at Nottingham, that the members of the Association were persons appointed by the churches. Two years afterwards, the meeting at Kegworth was still more explicit. In answer to the inquiry, "Who are understood to be members of the Association?" it was declared—that, though some of the churches considered all their officers as standing representatives, claiming besides a right to add to them annually such others as they thought necessary, and other churches chose all their representatives afresh every year; yet they all sat in the Association as representatives chosen by the churches who sent them: and that no person, whatever his station, could sit and vote as a member of the Association, unless as the actual representative sent by a church to that meeting. The Association was thus formally declared an assembly of delegates; and has ever since maintained that character.

It had also been usual for each Association to determine the place of the next meeting. But, as the limits of the Connection increased, the claimants for this honour became numerous: and the discussion not only occupied much time, but sometimes excited altercations. It was, therefore, thought prudent to adopt some fixed mode by which this matter might be regulated. Ac-

cordingly, in 1793, the Connection was divided into five districts ; and it was agreed that the Association should visit each in the revolution of eight years. In the first year of the eight, it was appointed to be in London ; in the second and sixth, in Nottinghamshire or Derbyshire ; in the third and seventh, in Lincolnshire ; in the fourth and eighth, in Leicestershire or Warwickshire ; and, in the fifth, in Yorkshire. It was left to the decision of the respective Conferences at what place in each district the Association should be held. This arrangement commenced in 1794, and has been found very convenient. It is still acted upon : though probably the extension of the Connection and change of circumstances may render it necessary, in a few years, to revise it.

The propriety of endeavouring to assist young men, who were called to the work of the ministry, in obtaining useful learning, seems early to have occupied the minds of the most judicious and zealous supporters of the New Connection.* As

* The first allusion to this subject, that has fallen under our notice, is a manuscript found among the papers of the late Mr. Dan Taylor, intitled "A Plan for assisting the studies and improving the qualifications of young men, who appear to possess abilities for the ministry, and are recommended as possessing such qualifications, by the churches to which they belong : humbly proposed to the consideration of my brethren, the ministers and other representatives, associated at Coventry, May 26th. and 27th. 1779." The writer considers the manner of raising the necessary funds, and of conducting the design —the regulations respecting the tutor and students—the course of study, &c. This paper is unhappily imperfect, but it contains the principles and many of the particular measures adopted eighteen years afterwards. The idea, it seems, was not then new ; for the writer says, "The design has annually obtained credit and reputation, since it was first begun by a poor blind brother in Wadsworth church and myself." This points to an origin of the Academical Institution not generally known.

the churches increased in number and respectability, the necessity of such assistance would naturally press still more forcibly on every thinking observer. The subject, therefore, became the frequent topic of conversation, amongst individuals, and on public occasions. It was not, however, till the Association at Boston, in 1796, that it received proper attention. That meeting recommended it “to all the churches to adopt some method which might lay a solid foundation and prove an effectual means of giving instruction to such young men as should be thought, by their respective churches, to possess ministerial abilities: and, in order to facilitate the execution of this important design, it was recommended to the minister, or some other leading member, in each society, to open immediately a subscription for the purpose: Messrs. Joseph Johnson and W. Parkinson, of Quorndon, being appointed treasurers for that year.”

This recommendation had the desired effect; and prepared the Connection to enter heartily on the business, at the following Association, at Kegworth. At that meeting, the subject being introduced, half an hour was set apart for one of the brethren to deliver his sentiments on it; and a letter, to the same purport, of considerable length, written by a friend at Loughborough, was read. After a serious discussion, it was unanimously resolved, “that it was highly necessary to do something to instruct young men in biblical knowledge, in order to fit them for the work of the ministry.” In pursuance of this decision, it was agreed to establish funds, and open books for subscriptions, without delay; and to choose a committee to manage the concerns of the proposed institution. Messrs. S. Heard, of Not-

tingham, J. Bakewell, of Castle-Donington, and W. Parkinson, of Quorndon, were requested to act as joint treasurers. No sooner were these preliminaries settled, than twenty-five friends of the undertaking, who were then present, laid the foundation of the Fund by donations, amounting, in the whole, to nearly one hundred and seventy-five pounds; and eight persons became annual subscribers to the amount of sixteen pounds per annum.

Thus commenced an institution, which has continued to the present day; and, notwithstanding the difficulties and prejudices with which all first attempts have usually to struggle, has been of real advantage to the cause of religion. A well written letter was printed and circulated; explaining the objects of the undertaking, answering objections to it, and exhorting the friends of the cause to exert themselves in its support. This appeal produced considerable effect: and, in January, 1798, an Academy for young ministers was opened, under the superintendence of Mr. Dan Taylor, at Mile End, near London. Six months afterwards, a meeting of the subscribers was held, at Loughborough, June 11th. 1798; at which the attendance of all the supporters of the plan was urged, to consider matters of importance: and they were earnestly solicited to exert themselves to increase its resources; as applications had been received from several young men, who could not be admitted, on account of the low state of the finances.

But the attention of the Connection was at length excited, and this infant institution received encouraging support. A letter, inserted in the Minutes of the Association at Spalding, in 1800, may be considered as containing official

information respecting the state of the institution, at the close of this period; and will form a proper conclusion to our present account. After stating the object and origin of the undertaking, it proceeds thus. "This design, we are happy to say, has been patronized since its commencement, beyond our most sanguine expectations; and some of the fruits have already been reaped, which, in so short a period, have exceeded our fairest hopes.—The great importance of the object, the flattering prospects which have been presented and which in a measure have been realized, encourage us to persevere with increasing ardour. Enlarged scenes open on our view; and more extensive good invites us to more vigorous exertion. We implore your assistance, brethren, in this glorious cause; which we doubt not will repay all your labours on your own heads and on your children and posterity to the latest generations." Such were the pleasing hopes entertained by the friends of the Academy in 1800: we shall have another occasion to examine how far they were realized.

The practice of addressing circular letters to the churches with the Minutes of the annual Association, was continued, with a few exceptions, throughout this period. They proceeded generally from the pen of Mr. D. Taylor; who, at the request of his brethren, drew up interesting epistles on—the operation of the holy Spirit—the depravity of human nature—the duties of church members to each other—the evidence of regeneration—and several pieces respecting the Academy. So highly did his friends esteem these services, that, in 1796, when the circular on the Duties of Church Members was read, at Boston, it was unanimously resolved, "That the thanks

of this Association be given to brother D. Taylor, for writing the circular Letter ; and for all his other essential services to our Connection : and that this resolution be printed in the Minutes."—Mr. J. Taylor wrote the circular for 1790, on Family Worship ; and Mr. S. Deacon the one for 1797, on Church Order and Discipline ;—both very useful compositions.

Towards the close of this period, a monthly publication, entitled the General Baptist Magazine, was undertaken, by a society of well-wishers to the cause, under the sanction of the Association. Mr. Dan Taylor was appointed editor : and, for some time, it promised to be of great service to the Connection. It did not, however, obtain sufficient support ; and was, therefore, discontinued, in December, 1800, at the close of the third volume. The profits, had any accrued, were destined to aid the funds of the Academy ; but its failure involved the parties concerned in considerable loss.

CHAP. III.

A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE NEW CONNECTION, FROM THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY; WITH A VIEW OF ITS PRESENT STATE, AND SOME ACCOUNT OF ITS DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE.

AS there would be an evident difficulty, and no small indelicacy, in writing a detailed history of recent transactions, in which many of the Author's living friends, and even the Author himself, have been personally concerned ; it has

been thought most prudent to insert only a brief notice of the principal events that have occurred since 1800 ; with a more particular review of the prior history of such churches as have, since that period, joined the Connection : and to conclude the work with a description of the present state of the New Connection, and some hints respecting the doctrines and discipline of the churches which compose that union.

SECT. 1.—A Sketch of the Proceedings of the Churches in the Midland Counties, since A.D. 1800.

THOUGH the friends at Barton,* have been constantly complaining of the want of ministerial assistance, yet the cause of the Redeemer in that neighbourhood appears, during the last seventeen years, to have been gradually extending its limits. Their senior pastor, the elder Mr. S. Deacon, was advanced in life, and soon became incapable, through the infirmities of age, of taking his part in the labours of the ministry. After lingering several years, in a state of helpless debility, he was released by death, March 19th. 1812, in the ninety-eighth year of his age. His son, who had, for many years, been joint pastor with his venerable father, had then reached his sixty-seventh year, and was very feeble. He was assisted, in his public services, by several young ministers, but more regularly by Mr. Jacob Brewin, whose labours were well approved. Feb. 18th. 1816, Mr. Deacon resigned the pastoral office ; and, fourteen days afterwards, was called to his reward. About a week previous, Mr. J.

* *Supra*, p. 221.

Brewin had been cut off by death, in the midst of his usefulness: and the church was left destitute.

Yet, notwithstanding these trials, the cause prospered. Additions were frequent: and, in 1809, forty-two were baptized on a profession of faith. Preaching was introduced into several new places, with encouraging success: the meeting houses at Barton and Balson were enlarged, and rooms for the accommodation of Sunday-schools added to each of them: and, in 1814, a new meeting-house was erected between Bagworth and Thornton, at an expence of nearly three hundred pounds. In 1817, the number of members was three hundred and twelve, who were peaceful and united.

Aug. 26th. 1798, those members of the church at Barton who dwelt at *Hugglescote* and its vicinity, were formed into a distinct society, consisting of eighty-five members.* They called Mr. Thomas Orton, one of their own friends, to serve them in the ministry; and he was ordained to the pastoral office, May 18th. 1799. This interest has continued to improve. In 1817, the number of members had increased to one hundred and fifty-seven: they had then two assistant preachers, Messrs. W. Pollard and J. Dean; and had extended their labours to Stanton-under-Bardon, Whitwick, Swannington, and Ibstock: at all which places they maintain regular preaching: and, in 1814, erected a meeting-house at Ibstock. In 1809, a Sunday-school was opened at Hugglescote; and a convenient building was erected for its accommodation: in which one

* Supra, p. 220.

hundred and twenty scholars are now instructed. The last reports from this society are very encouraging.

At *Melbourn*,* the interest of religion continued to gain ground, especially in that part of the church which assembled at *Packington*.—Preaching was introduced into various dark villages, with a cheering prospect of good being done. But the weak and precarious state of the health of Mr. E. Whitaker, their pastor, cast a gloom on all their undertakings. After being laid aside for several months, from his ministerial labours, death released him from a state of pain and inaction, July 10th. 1808, at the early age of forty-two. Previous to his decease, the brethren at *Packington* had amicably separated from this society. Those who remained at *Melbourn* suffered great inconvenience, after Mr. E. Whitaker's death, through want of proper ministerial supplies. Their distress induced them inadvertently to invite preachers who had lately seceded from other denominations; and this increased their difficulties. After various anxious endeavours and painful disappointments, they applied, in 1815, to Mr. John Preston, the pastor of the general baptist church in Great Suffolk-street, Southwark. He accepted their invitation, and removed to *Melbourn*, at the succeeding Christmas. His services were crowned with pleasing success; and twenty-four were baptized within six months after his arrival. The number of members, June, 1817, was two hundred and twenty-seven; and they had a few candidates for fellowship. They were then at peace among themselves.

* Supra p. 224.

We have seen already, that, in 1800, those members of Melbourn church, who resided at *Packington*, invited Mr. Joseph Goadby, to labour amongst them; and, that they were then nearly independent of the parent society.* A nominal union continued, however, for several years; and, during that interval, much was done in spreading the news of salvation into various adjacent places. In 1800, Mr. Goadby licensed a house at *Ashby-de-la-zouch*, a considerable market town, a few miles north-east of *Packington*: and soon afterwards a house was purchased and fitted up for public worship, which has ever since been regularly maintained at *Ashby*, with encouraging success. In 1802, the gospel was introduced into *Austrey*, a dark village in *Warwickshire*, nine miles south-west of *Ashby*; where the word has been made peculiarly useful.

In 1807, the connection between this society and *Melbourn*, was formally dissolved by mutual consent; and this church became a distinct body, consisting of one hundred and five members. They invited Mr. Goadby to accept the office of pastor over them: and, in compliance with their request, he was ordained, Sept. 26th. 1808. The union thus formed was abundantly blessed; and the interest has prospered under his care. A new meeting-house was erected, in 1811, at *Measham*, where, for many years, preaching had been maintained in a dwelling house. They have also begun to rebuild their meeting-house at *Ashby*, in a more respectable style: which, it is hoped, will tend to recommend the interest in that populous town. The number of members, in 1817, was one hundred and twenty-seven.

* Supra p. 224.

The interest at *Cauldwell*,* languished for many years after the death of Mr. C. Norton; the supplies of preaching being uncertain, and, in some instances, unedifying. After various disappointments, they invited Mr. J. Pollard, of Swithland; who, fixing his residence at Burton-upon-Trent, became their regular minister. The cause seemed to revive under his care; but secular difficulties soon obliged him to leave them. He was succeeded by Mr. Jarvis; but though his labours were made useful, he also was under the necessity of removing. In 1811, they were destitute of a minister, and complain that religion was on the decline. Not long afterwards, they obtained the assistance of Mr. Gamble, of Leicester, and the drooping interest experienced a considerable revival: twenty-six persons being added to the church by baptism, in 1813. In 1816, the number of members had increased to eighty-two: and though some of their places of preaching were thinly attended; yet "others were crowded with serious hearers; many of whom they hoped would soon come forward to follow the Lamb." But, in 1817, troubles arose; their minister left them; and their members sunk to sixty-six.—Several unsuccessful attempts had been made by the friends at Cauldwell, to introduce their ministers into the neighbouring town of Burton-upon-Trent; but, in 1814, they licensed a room there for preaching, which, at first, was supplied chiefly by Mr. Moss, who had joined them from the particular baptists. But he soon afterwards dropt all connection with them; and their hopes became less sanguine.

* *Supra*, p. 226.

They still, however, persevere in the attempt : and there is some prospect of ultimate success.

Mr. W. Felkin was ordained to the pastoral office over the church at *Kegworth*,* in June 1801, when Mr. D. Taylor gave the charge, and Mr. R. Smith addressed the people. His labours were acceptable, both to his friends and the neighbours. In 1801, a considerable expence was incurred in repairing the meeting-house at *Diseworth*; and, in the following year, a gallery was erected for the accommodation of the increased congregation at *Kegworth*. The cause of the Redeemer gradually gained ground, till 1810, when, though many valuable christians had been removed by death, there were upwards of one hundred and twenty members. Yet some unpleasant circumstances then occurred, which induced Mr. Felkin to resign the office of pastor over this church. For several years, he served another congregation, though he still resided at *Kegworth*. During this separation, supplies were obtained from neighbouring ministers, but the congregations and the church greatly decreased. Towards the close of 1813, the friends of the cause became deeply impressed with the necessity of obtaining a regular pastor; and, directing their attention to Mr. Felkin, made an united effort to regain him. At length, he yielded to their unanimous request, and resumed his former station amongst them. Since this re-union a pleasing degree of harmony has subsisted, and the prospect is become more cheering. Death has indeed made frequent inroads among them ; but, in 1817, their number

* Supra, p. 229.

amounted to ninety-seven.—In consequence of the insecurity of the title of the original meeting-house at Kegworth, joined to other considerations, it was determined to remove the place of worship to another situation. A piece of ground was therefore procured, in an eligible part of the town ; and, at an expence of four hundred and fifty pounds, a commodious building erected ; which was opened, Dec. 26th. 1815, by Messrs. T. Orton and R. Smith.

The friends at *Sutton Bonington*,* who separated from Kegworth church, were formed into a distinct society, Nov. 5th. 1795 : the number of members then being twenty-five. They were supplied with preaching, for some time, by the labours of Mr. W. Smith, and the occasional visits of neighbouring ministers. But, in 1802, Mr. Smith's weak state of health obliged him to decline the work of the ministry ; and, for several years, they depended on the friendly assistance of the preachers from Kegworth and Loughborough, and sometimes from Leake. In 1805, Mr. Wilders, a young man who had been called to the sacred work by the church at Kegworth, Mr. Smith, who was enabled in some degree to resume his labours, and Mr. Tarratt, who had lately settled in those parts, united in carrying on the cause of the Redeemer among this people. Their mutual efforts were blest : the congregation increased, and additions to the church were frequent. About this time, they established regular preaching at Normanton, a dark village in the vicinity ; where many attended and several heard with profit. In 1808, by some spirited efforts

* Supra p. 227.

among themselves, assisted by the liberality of a few friends, they succeeded in removing a pecuniary incumbrance which had long been a burden on the society. They then ventured to engage a larger place at Normanton; and, fit it up for public worship; which was opened by Mr. Felkin, June 15th. 1809. It has also been usefully employed as a sunday school. This year also they repaired the meeting-house at Sutton Bonington, and inclosed the burying ground, at an expence of twenty-four pounds, which they cheerfully raised among themselves. These exertions, considering that most of them are in very moderate circumstances, certainly do them honour. Soon afterwards the cause sustained a heavy loss, in the death of Mr. George Doughty and Mr. Theophilus Thorman, who had been pillars in the house of the Lord.— For some succeeding years, the reports of this church complain of coldness, decay and worldly-mindedness; till about 1811, when Mr. Wilders became in a more regular manner their minister; and symptoms of improvement gradually appeared. 1817, the members were sixty-five: and their congregations were encouraging.— Some years previous, regular preaching had been established at Hathern, where the gospel had been occasionally preached from the first introduction of the cause into these parts.

At the close of the last century, the friends at *Long-Whatton and Belton*,* who had formerly been members of the church at Kegworth, formed themselves into a distinct society, consisting of forty-one members; and chose Mr. W. Corah,

* *Supra p. 228.*

one of their number who had acted as assistant preacher with Mr. Tarratt, as their minister. Under his superintendance the cause was supported, with considerable harmony and some degree of success, till 1811, when he was removed to the church above, at the age of seventy-four. After his decease, his friends depended, for some time, on occasional supplies; but soon turned their eyes to Mr. John Green, of Loughborough, who accepted their invitation, in 1814. After his arrival, the congregations increased and many were added to the church. A new meeting-house was erected at Belton, which was soon filled with attentive hearers. They had seventy-seven members, in 1817.

For a few months after Mr. Felkin's departure from *Ilkiston*,* the church there obtained a supply of preachers from the neighbouring congregations; but they soon invited Mr. W. Pickering, who was then labouring at Ashford, to take the charge of them. He complied; and arrived at Ilkiston, Aug. 12th. 1800. Considerable success attended his ministry; and, in three years after his settling with them, sixty-five persons were added to the church by baptism. The cause spread itself into various adjacent villages; and the friends of religion began to indulge sanguine hopes of lasting prosperity. At Smalley, their hopes have been, in a good degree, realized; but, at Ilkiston, coldness, disorders and disaffection soon checked the progress of the truth. Though transient seasons of harmony intervened during the interval; yet the root of bitterness continued to spread, till 1815; when Mr. Pickering thought

* *Supra* p. 231.

himself obliged to resign the office of pastor over them, and remove to Stayley-Bridge. After this event, about twenty disaffected members withdrew from the society; and peace was, in a good measure, restored: Ministerial aid was procured from the sister churches; and the interest appeared to revive: thirty-two having been baptized, in 1816. In the following year, they enlarged the meeting-house at Smalley; and were crowded with attentive hearers at Newport, a neighbouring village, into which they had introduced the gospel. In 1817, the number of members, was one hundred and seventy-one.

Mr. Thomas Pickering continued to preside over the church at *Castle-Donington*,* with diligence and success, for several years after the close of the last period. In 1801, a new meeting-house was built at Sawley, which cost nearly three hundred pounds. A few years afterwards, there was a pleasing revival in this neighbourhood; and many came forward and declared their attachment to the Saviour: no fewer than eighty-five being baptized in the three years previous to June, 1806. They then preached regularly, to numerous congregations, at five places; and ascribe much of the success of the gospel, to the zeal and diligence with which prayer-meetings were supported. But the precarious state of their esteemed pastor's health cast a shade over all these animating prospects. In 1807, after a long and dangerous affliction, he was unexpectedly restored to his ministerial labours. The hearers then became so numerous, that they were compelled to enlarge their place of worship. While

* Supra p. 232.

this was performing, Mr. Pickering had a dangerous relapse, which again confined him to his bed; and he died, Nov. 15th. 1807, aged fifty years. Three days afterwards, his remains were interred; and Mr. Felkin preached his funeral sermon, from 2. Tim. iv. 7, 8: to a deeply affected and numerous congregation, in the enlarged meeting-house, which was then occupied for the first time after its enlargement.

This solemn event made a deep impression on the church; but they did not despond. They obtained supplies for the present; and soon after requested Mr. William Brand, of Loughborough, to remove to them. This he did, in June, 1810; and his labours were rendered useful. Preaching was soon afterwards introduced at Shardlow, an adjacent village, with a good prospect of success. Various circumstances have, indeed, since occurred, which have had a tendency to excite trouble and misunderstanding; but, in general, a pleasing degree of harmony and union has been preserved. The number of members, in 1817, was two hundred and forty-five: of whom thirty-eight had been baptized the preceding year.—They were then well attended with hearers at all their stations.

In 1800, the church at *Loughborough*,* had spread to an inconvenient extent; and it became necessary to divide into more compact societies. The number of members and fewness of the preachers rendered this a delicate and difficult task; and it caused considerable agitation for several years. The friends who resided at Rothley and its neighbourhood first acknowledged

* *Sopra p. 337.*

the propriety of the measure ; and, in 1802, formed themselves into a distinct body. In 1804, the separation of the branch at Quorndon was finally effected : and the members that remained to Loughborough church, after this arrangement, were one hundred and sixty-four ; who dwelt in the town, and in the surrounding villages of Coats, Normanton, Dishley, Hathern, Sheepshed, Garrenton, Thorp Acre and Little Thorp.

While this business was in agitation, Mr. N. Hurst, being invited to assist the friends at Loughborough, preached for them, with much acceptance, for about a year ; and then returned to Nottingham. After his departure, they were well furnished with supplies from their sister churches, and the cause prospered. In 1806, they invited Mr. W. Brand, who had spent some time at the Academy, to labour for them during a year ; at the expiration of which, they requested him to become their regular minister. His exertions appear to have been blest ; as twenty-nine were baptized in 1807. But several causes of uneasiness soon occurred ; and, in the beginning of 1810, he left Loughborough. Not long afterwards, this church invited Mr. Thomas Stevenson, of Leicester, to assist them ; and he removed thither. For some time, his labours were successful, and the church harmonious : but, in 1813, troubles arose, and a lamentable spirit of disunion prevailed ; which, after distressing the society for many months, issued in a separation of several of the members from fellowship.

During this intestine confusion, the congregations continued numerous ; and, the peace of the church being restored, the interest experienced a considerable revival. The hearers increased, till it was found necessary to rebuild the

meeting-house, on a much larger scale. This was effected, at an expence of nearly one thousand pounds : six hundred of which was liberally raised in the neighbourhood, principally among their own friends. The place was re-opened, Sept. 25th. 1815: when Mr. R. Smith and Mr. R. Alliott, both of Nottingham, were engaged. The cause continuing to prosper under Mr. Stevenson's care, he was invited to accept the office of pastor ; and was ordained, Oct. 8th. 1816 : when Mr. R. Smith gave the charge to the minister, from 1 Tim. iii. 15 ; Mr. W. Pickering addressed the church, from Luke iii. 14 ; and Mr. Orton delivered a discourse to the officers of the society, from Phil. ii. 20. The prospects are still encouraging. In 1817, the members amounted to two hundred and fifty-two : they were then peaceable and united, had nineteen candidates for fellowship, and were well attended both at their preaching and prayer-meetings.

The friends at *Rothley* and its neighbourhood separated from the church at Loughborough, and became a distinct society of seventy-three members, at Christmas, 1801. They chose Messrs. J. Ward and J. Pollard for ruling elders ; and Messrs. W. Parkinson and J. Slea for deacons. At first, they shared with their former associates in the services of Messrs. B. Pollard and C. Briggs, in rotation, at Loughborough, Quorndon, and Rothley. But soon finding this mode of supply inconvenient, they called Mr. J. Pollard to the work of the ministry. He preached regularly for them, for about a year, and then removed his dwelling to a distance. They afterwards invited Mr. J. Goddard, of Ilkiston, to assist them ; and he removed to Rothley, June 21st. 1803. Under

his care the cause prospered, for several years ; and great harmony and affection prevailed among the members. In 1808, they called Mr. Thomas Wesley, a promising young member, to preach the gospel ; whose services were very acceptable.

Their hands being thus strengthened, they preached more regularly at their established stations, and more frequently in the neighbouring villages, with increasing prospects of usefulness. But some unhappy disputes arising, checked the growing cause ; and issued in the separation of the members who dwelt at Woodhouse Eaves and its vicinity from this church. Forty-seven members remained with Mr. Goddard, at Rothley ; and, though the health of this minister declined daily, yet the cause advanced, and their numbers increased. Death, however, removed him from his friends, July 6th. 1812. This stroke was improved, at the funeral, by Mr. B. Pollard, from 2 Cor. v. 1 : and, on the following Lord's-day, by Mr. Felkin, from 2 Cor. iv. 7.

For a few years after Mr. Goddard's death, this congregation was supplied by its sister churches, and found a difficulty in obtaining a suitable minister. At length, they invited Mr. Austin, who settled with them, in the spring of 1815.—They have since introduced the gospel into Sileby, a populous village two miles east of Rothley ; where they licensed a house, and commenced preaching, June, 1816. The number of members, in 1817, was seventy-two ; and the society then enjoyed peace and union.

The friends at *Woodhouse Eaves* were formed into an independent church, Decem. 13th. 1809 : the members then amounted to thirty-four. Mr.

Thomas Wesley was invited to labour amongst them ; and, for some years, his services gave general satisfaction. The cause gradually improved: and, in 1815, the revival became more pleasing. But, in the following year, Mr. Wesley was, for several months, laid aside from his labours ; and, after his recovery, dissatisfaction manifested itself, and caused a separation between him and the church. Occasional supplies have since been obtained. In 1817, there were fifty-six members.

We have already seen that the friends at *Quorndon* did, in effect, separate from the church at Loughborough, in 1801 ; but, owing to various perplexing circumstances, the division was not formally completed till 1803 ; when they became a distinct church. The original number of members was one hundred and seventy-four : and they retained Mr. B. Pollard as their pastor. At that time, they preached regularly at Quorndon, Mountsorrel and Wanton ; and had encouraging congregations. In 1805, and the following year, there appeared a considerable revival. Numbers joined the church ; many of whom had been educated in their sunday-school, and ascribed their conversion to the admonitions which they had there received. In 1806, the members had increased to one hundred and ninety-two : but, from that time, there has been a painful decline. Disorderly conduct in too many professors, not only diminished their number ; but weakened the hands of those who were sincerely seeking the welfare of Zion. About the same time, death deprived them of some valuable characters ; and the pressure of the times caused several useful and active members to remove to a distance.—

All these circumstances contributed to increase their despondency ; yet they enjoyed a comfortable degree of peace and union among themselves ; and the congregations continued to be encouraging.

Mr. Pollard's health now began to be uncertain, and his strength to fail. He was no longer able to exert himself, for the promotion of religion, with that activity and spirit for which he had formerly been remarkable. The church, therefore, engaged Mr. Pywell, one of their members whom they had lately called to the ministry, to assist their pastor in the sacred work of preaching. For a short time, they laboured together with great zeal and cordiality : but, in 1816, Mr. Pollard was wholly laid aside, by a long and severe indisposition, from which he recovered but very slowly. Finding his health not likely to be re-established, in 1817, he resigned the pastoral office

During his indisposition, Mr. Balm, who had been employed as an occasional preacher, by the church at Nottingham, was invited to assist this society, and removed to Quorndon. In 1817, their members were one hundred and forty-nine; who made this affecting report to the Association. " As a church, we are in a forlorn situation. Our late esteemed pastor has declined every part of the pastoral work, through affliction ; our assistant minister, brother Pywell, is incapable of preaching, through bodily weakness ; and the services of our other assistant, brother Balm, on account of worldly concerns, are unequal to the necessities of such a church. We want a suitable minister."

The spread of the cause at *Leake* and *Wimes-*

would,* at the close of the last period, suggested the propriety of dividing that large church into two distinct societies. This was effected in 1801: Leake and Wimeswould forming one body; and Broughton and its dependencies the other. The former then consisted of one hundred and eighty-three members; and retained Mr. Bissill, who resided at Wimeswould, for their minister. He, however, left these parts, in the spring of 1802; and returned into Lincolnshire. On his removal, this people invited Mr. Thomas Hoe, an assistant preacher at Broughton, to labour among them. In compliance with their wishes, he removed his residence to Wimeswould, May 10th. 1803. And though, for several years, the disorderly conduct of individuals brought great reproach on the cause, yet his labours were made very useful in turning sinners from the error of their ways. In 1811, a pleasing revival took place: and, in the following year, forty persons were baptized, on a profession of faith. But the prosperity of the rising interest was soon checked, by the introduction of doctrinal sentiments, which were deemed by many, inconsistent with the principles of the society. After much discussion and uneasiness, a few of the leading advocates of these novel opinions were excluded, and several others withdrew. The peace of the church was thus, in some degree, restored; but the injury done to the cause of truth has not yet been repaired. The members which, in 1813, amounted to two hundred and thirty-six, in 1817 had decreased to one hundred and ninety-two. Their last report, however, is encouraging; and affords reason to hope that the cause is recovering.

* Supra, p. 240.

In 1802, the friends at *Broughton* and its vicinity dissolved their connection with the church at Leake, and became a distinct body. Mr. R. Thurman, who had for a long time been pastor of the united society, continued to hold the same situation in this branch of it. At the formation it consisted of eighty-three members, scattered over the villages of Broughton, Stanton, Widmerpool, Dalby, Grimston, Saxelby and Hose ; at all which places they preached, either statedly or occasionally. Soon after this division, finding it difficult to hire a convenient place of worship at Widmerpool, they determined to erect a meeting-house in that village. This was opened, July 29th. 1804, by Mr. B. Pollard. The prospect there was, at that time, highly encouraging : but the scandalous conduct of individuals soon cast a cloud over it. Quarrels amongst professors, respecting secular concerns, and the declining strength of the aged pastor, contributed to deepen the gloom. Towards the close of 1811, Mr. Thurman resigned the pastoral office, and ceased from preaching. After some time, Mr. W. Hatton settled with this church, as their minister. At first, his labours were crowned with a degree of success, and several joined the church : but disunion and altercations still continuing, the interest again declined. Neighbouring ministers were, however, invited to visit them ; and their labours were blest to the increase both of the church and congregations. In 1817, the number of members was seventy-three ; and they hoped that religion was on the advance.

At the close of the last century, the church at *Friar-lane, Leicester*,* consisted of seventy-one

* *Supra*, p. 241.

members, and the state of religion was low. For several subsequent years, the cause appeared to improve. In 1808, sixteen were added by baptism, and four received from sister churches: among whom was Mr. B. Wood, from Hinckley, who was requested to assist them as a minister. In 1810, their number amounted to one hundred and thirty. But some unpleasant circumstances occurring soon afterwards, considerable alterations ensued; and the assistant minister, with many others, left this society: so that the members were reduced to eighty-six. When this tumult had subsided, an extraordinary change took place. The congregations increased; and additions were frequent. In 1812, preaching was introduced at Billesdon, a considerable village, nine miles east of Leicester. Here their endeavours were very successful, amidst much opposition: a commodious meeting-house was shortly erected; and, in 1817, above forty of the inhabitants and neighbours had joined the church at Leicester; among whom Mr. Creaton then laboured with acceptance. In 1815, preaching was commenced, by this church, at Thurndon, a village four miles from Leicester, with encouraging prospects. In 1817, the number of members was one hundred and eighty-five: and they anticipated increasing prosperity.

The persons who left the church in Friar-lane, in 1794,* uniting together, endeavoured to carry on the cause of Christ, at *Archdeacon-lane*, in the same town. The Association so far approved of this attempt, as to declare them worthy of the countenance of the neighbouring churches; and

* Supra p. 241.

advised them to look about for a minister. In the following year, some ineffectual attempts were made, by the same assembly, to effect a reconciliation. They continued, however, a distinct body; and, in 1798, made application for admission into the New Connection. Being advised to take the usual steps, they found a degree of difficulty in complying; and, for several years, suspended all further attempts. In 1805, they seem to have taken their place silently on the Minutes, without any previous discussion. This society then consisted of thirty-four members; but wished for more life and zeal. In 1806, Mr. Thomas Stevenson was invited to labour among them; and his ministrations were blest to the reviving of the cause. They had, previous to this date, built a meeting-house; and, in 1807, added galleries to it. The hearers increased; and, in that year, thirty were added to the church by baptism. For some time, the cause continued to prosper, and preaching was maintained at Smeeton and Fleckney, two adjacent villages, with encouraging prospects of success. In 1811, Mr. Stevenson accepted an invitation from the friends at Loughborough, and left Leicester; when Mr. Felkin, who had lately resigned his charge at Kegworth, accepted the call of this society, and became their minister; though he still continued to reside at Kegworth. The same year, they had also an accession of members who had withdrawn from Friar Lane.

Though they complain of the lowness of the cause, fifteen were added to their fellowship, in the following year; and their number then amounted to one hundred and twenty-four. Yet disorderly conduct in professors, and want of zeal still checked the progress of the cause, and grieved

the hearts of its real friends : and, in the close of 1813, Mr. Felkin discontinued his labours for them. After his departure, Mr. Goodrich was requested to preach for this church ; and there appeared some symptoms of a revival ; but his services ceased in 1816. This appears to have been a season of peculiar trial and discouragement ; and the painful measure of exclusion became frequently necessary. Yet methods were adopted, by which, it was hoped, peace and mutual affection might be restored. In 1817, the number of members was eighty-nine ; and the congregations, both at Leicester and in the villages, were considerably improved. For a long season, this society has received much ministerial and other assistance from Mr. Wood, who, in all these changing circumstances, has laboured to promote its welfare.

In consequence of the spread of the cause at *Hinckley*,* it was thought expedient to seek for more ministerial assistance ; and, in 1803, Mr. Thomas Yates, of Birmingham, accepted their invitation and settled amongst them. In the same year, they enlarged the meeting-house at Wolvey, which had became too small for the congregation. In 1805, a considerable revival commenced, and continued for several years. The number of hearers increased, so as to render the enlargement of the meeting-house indispensably necessary. A temporary gallery was, at first, erected ; but, the increase continuing, it was thought most prudent to erect a new meeting-house, in a more central part of the town. This was accordingly done, at an expence of

* Supra p. 244.

upwards of seventeen hundred pounds ; towards which the members and neighbours liberally subscribed more than six hundred. It was opened, Feb. 18th. 1807, by Messrs. R. Hall, of Leicester, D. Taylor, of London, and B. Pollard, of Quorndon.

The cause of the Redeemer continued to prosper, and the preaching of the word was rendered effectual to the salvation of sinners : upwards of one hundred and thirty having been baptized, in the four years previous to 1809. Though a few of these converts drew back to the world ; yet, many of them proved the sincerity of their conversion by a consistent conduct. This society had then increased to three hundred. In 1808, the ancient general baptist church at Earl-Shilton, which had probably existed from the time of the Commonwealth,* and was then reduced to sixteen members, desired to be united with the society at Hinckley. After mature deliberation the proposal was accepted : and, thus this church gained, not only an accession of members, but also a neat little meeting-house and a burying-ground. During this season of prosperity, three young members were called to the work of the ministry : Mr. B. Wood, now of Leicester ; Mr. J. Preston, of Melbourn ; and Mr. B. Compton, who at present labours in Cambridgeshire.

About 1810, the preachers from Hinckley paid occasional visits to Pailton, in Warwickshire, a village near Monks-Kerby. The prospect being encouraging, a piece of ground was purchased at Monks-Kerby ; and a small place

* This is most probably the same society which is mentioned in the former part of this work, under the denomination of Eccleshelton. See Vol. I. pp. 160, 237.

of worship erected; which was opened, in the autumn of 1813, and was subsequently well attended. A few persons joined Hinckley church from this neighbourhood; and it was thought, that there was a good prospect of raising an interest, had not some rather delicate and perplexing circumstances damped the ardour and thwarted the exertions of the friends of the cause.

The church at Hinckley had now spread itself to such an extent, that it was thought best, for the general convenience, to divide it into smaller societies. This occasioned much discussion and not a little anxiety. After various deliberation, the friends at Thurlaston and Earl Shilton voluntarily withdrew, in 1814. In the year following, a separation was effected, though not without great difficulty, between this society and the friends at Wolvey.—After these colonies had been planted, there remained about one hundred members at Hinckley. They applied themselves to rectify the breaches which these separations had naturally made; and chose two ruling elders and two deacons. They enjoyed a pleasing degree of peace and unanimity; and prayed for a speedy revival of the cause of religion among them; of which they hoped that they perceived some encouraging symptoms. In 1817, the number of members was one hundred and six.

The friends at *Thurlaston, Earl-Shilton* and the adjacent places, who withdrew peaceably from the church at Hinckley, in 1814, formed themselves into a distinct society, consisting of seventy five members. Mr. Yates, who had for some time been an assistant preacher at Hinckley, removed to Thurlaston and became their min-

ter. The cause prospered in their hands, especially at Thurlaston; where the increasing congregation made them propose the enlarging of the meeting-house. In 1817, the members were one hundred and eleven; of whom fourteen had been baptized in the preceeding year.

When the church at *Wolvey* was formed, in 1815, by a friendly separation from Hinckley, it consisted of eighty members, and maintained preaching at Wolvey, Witheybrook and Burton. Mr. A. Jarvis, who had resided amongst them, for a few years, became their minister. They were well attended with hearers and their prospects encouraging. But subsequent reports were less favourable: a spirit of disunion having risen amongst them, and produced its usual effects. In 1817, the number of members amounted to ninety-nine, and they had introduced preaching into Attelborough, a village four miles west of Wolvey.

At the commencement of the present century, the church at *Longford*,* suffered much from the pressure of the times, which appears to have greatly retarded the progress of the cause. This drooping state continued till 1806; when a partial revival took place. Mr. Cramp's services being blest, he was ordained to the pastoral office: and, about the same time, preaching was introduced into a neighbouring village called Sow, with some prospect of success. The following year, a new meeting-house was erected at Longford; and, for a time, was well attended. The congregations indeed were respectable; but

* *Supra*, p. 246.

additions to the church few: and the members complained of deadness and neglect of the means of grace. In 1816, this society consisted of one hundred and eighty members, who still made the same complaint.

The worthy Mr. Green continued to labour among the friends at *Birmingham*,* with great affection and diligence; and was blest with encouraging success. The removal of Mr. Yates, to Hinckley, in 1803, threw the whole service of the society on Mr. Green: who, though sincerely desirous of being spent in the sacred work, yet was unavoidably much occupied in secular affairs. The cause, however, continued gradually to advance, both with respect to hearers and members: and, in 1807, the increase of the congregation induced them to repair their meeting-house, and enlarge it with galleries; at an expence of one hundred and sixty pounds. The prospect was daily improving, when it pleased the great Head of the church, to call his servant to his rest: Mr. Green dying Nov. 2nd. 1808. As a strong attachment existed between the minister and people, this stroke made a deep impression on the church.

After being furnished with occasional supplies for some months, they invited Mr. G. Cheatle, who had been called to the ministry by the church at Castle-Donington, to preach for them. He removed to Birmingham, at Christmas, 1809: and, his ministrations being well approved and successful, he was ordained to the pastoral office, June 22nd. 1813. About the same period, preaching was introduced into King's Heath, a popu-

* Supra p. 248.

lous and increasing village, three miles south-east of Birmingham, in which there had previously been no place of worship of any denomination. The attempt met with encouragement: the attention of the inhabitants was arrested; several hearing, believed and were baptized: a Sunday school was commenced, and soon filled with ignorant children: and, at length, a commodious meeting-house was built, capable of seating upwards of three hundred people, which was opened, under very promising auspices, Oct. 22nd. 1816.

Though trials and disorders have frequently interrupted the progress of religion in this church, yet it has regularly improved. And, in 1817, the members which, at the close of the last period, were only forty, had increased to two hundred and one.

The friends at *Sutton-Coldfield*,* after their separation from the church at Birmingham, stood, for a considerable time, unconnected with the Association. During this interval, they were occasionally supplied by Mr. Green, and other ministers, till Mr. Smart settled with them, who, for several years, became their regular minister. In 1809, they applied for re-admission into the New Connection, and were received: their number then was thirty-two; their meetings were well attended; and their state peaceable. Little alteration took place in their circumstances, till 1815, when Mr. Smart, removing into Wales, left them destitute. The ministers at Birmingham kindly stept forwards to their assistance; and their friendly aid appears to have produced

* Supra p. 248.

good effects ; as fifteen joined the church in the following year. In 1817, the number of members was forty-seven ; and they had licensed a commodious room for public worship at Sutton, which promised to be very useful.

The cause of religion among the general baptists at *Nottingham*,* continued to flourish, for many years after the close of the last century. Mr. R. Smith's labours were abundant, useful and highly acceptable. At that time, they maintained preaching at five different places. The prospect was so encouraging at Basford, that it was thought necessary to erect a new meeting-house in that village, which was opened Sept. 25th. 1802. In 1809, the same pleasing considerations induced them to build a commodious place of worship at Bulwell and Arnold, villages, each about four miles from Nottingham. In subsequent years, death called away several valuable and judicious friends, and their loss was severely felt in this rising society, which had then increased to four hundred members. Some very distressing circumstances occurred, a few years afterwards, which exposed them to much reproach, and tended greatly to discourage their efforts. The interest, however, appeared to be recovering from the shock it had received ; and, in 1816, regular preaching was maintained, every Lord's-day, at Nottingham, Basford, New Radford and Bulwell ; and Mansfield was supplied once a fortnight. The congregations were encouraging, and additions frequent : and the number of members then amounted to four hundred and fifty. But, in the following spring, new

* *Supra*, p. 251.

subjects of contention arose ; and this once flourishing, harmonious, and respectable society, the glory of the New Connection was unhappily involved in the most deplorable and disgraceful confusion.

In the beginning of the present century, some members of the general baptist churches in Nottinghamshire, settled at *Mansfield*, a large manufacturing market-town, fourteen miles north of Nottingham ; and commenced preaching there with an encouraging prospect of doing good. They were soon informed that a substantial meeting-house, situated in an eligible part of the town, was on sale, at the moderate price of three hundred pounds. The midland conference laid the case before the Association, in 1815 ; and it was resolved to make the purchase. The transacting of the business was referred to the friends at Nottingham ; and the churches were requested to make collections, in order to raise the money.

The purchase was accordingly compleated ; and the place was opened, July 28th. 1815, by Mr. R. Smith ; when the congregations were large and encouraging. The ministers from Nottingham, Kirkby-Woodhouse and Retford, with occasional supplies from other churches, supported regular worship, and some ground was gained. Oct. 8th. following, Mr. Smith, baptized five persons, who had been brought to profess faith in Christ, by the preaching of the gospel in this place. The ordinance was administered at Mansfield-Woodhouse, a village upwards of a mile from the town, and a discourse delivered at the water side, to nearly two thousand auditors * In the evening, Mr. Smith preached

* Amongst them was a person who gloried in being an enemy
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in the meeting-house; and afterwards about twenty persons, including the five newly baptized, and several friends from Nottingham, sat down at the Lord's table.—For some time, the neighbouring ministers continued to visit Mansfield in rotation, and assist this infant cause; but, in the beginning of 1817, Mr. W. Smedley settled there, and preached more stately.—The friends still were considered as members of the church at Nottingham; though it was probable that a distinct interest would ultimately be formed.

Mr. Hardstaff held the office of pastor in the church at *Kirkby-Woodhouse*, during the first seventeen years of the nineteenth century; but the cause drooped under his care. Disaffection and disunion perplexed their councils and weakened their efforts; and the natural effects followed. The hearers diminished and the members

to dissenters. In order to turn this solemn service into ridicule and confusion, he had given an old sailor a shilling to jump, from the bridge, upon the back of the first candidate that went into the water; and had drowned a number of young dogs, which he distributed among the spectators, with directions to throw them into the water, during the administration of the ordinance. Having made these preparations, feeling a curiosity to hear what could be said in defence of a practice which appeared to him as madness, he placed himself directly in front of the preacher. He listened attentively and appeared affected. As soon as the sermon was concluded, he stept to the sailor and forbad him to interfere with the solemnity, telling him to keep the money. He then went to his agents in the croud, and positively prohibited them from using the dead dogs which he had provided: threatening, that he would throw the first person into the water that dared to make any disturbance. The spectators, struck with the change, behaved with the strictest propriety; and there is reason to hope that many felt the power of divine truth.

grew cold and careless. In 1814, these unhappy causes operated more violently and the number of members was reduced to thirty-nine. Subsequent years, however, exhibit a little improvement: and, in 1817, the members had risen to forty-seven; who appear to have enjoyed a comfortable degree of peace and union.

The church at *Gamston and Retford** were destitute of an ordained pastor, during the first seventeen years of the nineteenth century. Mr. J. Smedley continued to labour for them, and was assisted in the work of the ministry by Messrs. S. Skidmore and Shipstone. The cause of religion prospered in their hands; and they maintained regular preaching at five different places: twenty being baptized in the two last years. In 1815, the necessity of a larger place of worship at Retford became apparent; and zealous exertions were made to obtain one. One liberal friend offered the loan of a handsome sum for two years without interest; which encouraged his brethren to proceed in the good work with great vigour. At length, a large commodious meeting-house was compleated; and opened, May 25th. 1817, by Mr. Stevenson of Loughborough. A liberal collection was made on the occasion; and the female friends entered into a subscription for lighting the place. The old meeting-house was appropriated to the accommodation of a flourishing sunday school; and, in June of the same year, they made the following report of their state. "We have reason to be thankful both for temporal and especially for

* *Supra* p. 259.

spiritual blessings. We are well attended with hearers, particularly at Retford, and enjoy tolerable peace among ourselves."

The general baptists at *Derby*,* when Mr. James Taylor first settled with them, suffered great inconvenience through the want of a proper place of worship. Encouraged by the sanction of the association, they ventured, in 1800, to purchase a piece of ground ; and a committee was appointed, by the following association, to superintend the erection of a meeting-house. This was opened, July 20th, 1802. On this occasion, Messrs. Felkin of Kegworth, W. Pickering of Ilkiston, and E. Whitaker, of Melbourn, preached ; and were assisted in the devotional parts of the service by the ministers of the particular baptist and independent churches at Derby. After this event, the hearers increased ; and the cause began to assume a more encouraging aspect. The small society invited Mr. James Taylor to accept the pastoral office over them ; and he was ordained, March 30th, 1804 ; when Mr. Pollard addressed the minister, and Mr. S. Deacon the church. Preaching was then maintained at Derby, Alvaston, Barnaston, Allestrey, and Windley. Messrs. Barrow and Dallison, actively assisted the stated minister in dispensing the word ; and for a short time the congregation increased. But, though the members continued, in a great measure, united and peaceable ; yet the hearers soon began to decline and conversions were few. These discouragements induced Mr. Taylor to listen to the earnest invitations of the

* Supra, p. 261.

church at Heptonstall Slack, Yorkshire: and he left Derby, in Oct. 1807.

After his departure, supplies were obtained from the neighbouring societies, and a pleasing change ensued. The congregations became more numerous, and many were admitted to fellowship. In the spring of 1810, Mr. John Pike, who had been a member of the society in Church-lane, London, was invited to their assistance and removed to Derby. His labours were abundantly blest; fifty-eight being added to the church in the succeeding year. To accommodate these new converts and the increasing number of hearers, galleries were, in 1811, added to the meeting. But the congregations still continuing to increase, it was proposed to erect a new meeting-house, in a more eligible part of the town; and considerable exertions were made to raise funds for this purpose. This design was, however, ultimately abandoned; and the old building enlarged and repaired, in 1814, at a considerable expence.

This rapid increase had caused discipline to be much neglected; and the baneful effects were beginning to appear. But, in 1816, a more regular attention was paid to order; and the church being divided into classes, proper persons were appointed to superintend their conduct and religious improvement; who held stated meetings with the people of their charges. These measures appear to have been rendered useful. In 1817, thirty were baptized; who raised the number of members to one hundred and fifty-four.

In the spring of 1807, Mr. Joseph Barrow, a valuable and zealous member of the church at Derby, became acquainted with Mr. Taylor, a

respectable inhabitant of *Duffield*, a large and populous village, four miles north-east of Derby. The arguments of Mr. Barrow soon convinced his new associate, that believers' baptism was an ordinance of Christ ; and he joined the society at Derby. Anxious that his neighbours also should have an opportunity of hearing the truth, he invited his friend to come and preach at Duffield. This invitation was promptly accepted ; and Mr. Barrow delivered the first discourse, in that village, March 21st. 1807, from John iii. 16. The attention of the inhabitants was greatly excited, and numbers crowded to hear the new doctrine. A room was hired and prepared for public worship, capable of containing two hundred auditors : and the neighbouring ministers kindly assisted Mr. Barrow in his labours of love. The blessing of God gave success to their labours ; and many professed their faith in Christ by baptism. The room was soon found inadequate to the accommodation of the increasing number who thronged to hear ; and Mr. Taylor having, at that time, a large factory unoccupied, it was engaged and fitted up as a meeting-house ; which was opened, by Mr. Stevenson, April 23rd. 1809. Four hundred persons might be conveniently accommodated in this room ; and the expence, incurred by the necessary alterations, was cheerfully defrayed by the subscriptions of the friends of the cause. More than forty of the inhabitants of Duffield and its vicinity had then joined the church at Derby ; and several candidates waited for baptism.

But, while the truth was thus spreading at Duffield, circumstances arose in the parent society which induced these new converts to

secede from its communion. May 21th, 1810, they formed themselves into a distinct church, which then consisted of forty-seven members. Preaching was maintained at four adjacent villages, and three hundred hearers usually attended on the Lord's-day at Duffield. For two years their worthy and active friend, Mr. Barrow laboured diligently amongst them, in word and doctrine; and the ministers of neighbouring churches visited them every other Lord's-day. Their efforts being crowned with success, and the sphere of their usefulness extending itself, it became desirable to obtain more regular ministerial aid. They accordingly invited Mr. Richard Ingham; who, having been called forth to preach the gospel by the church at Heptonstall-Slack of which he was a member, had spent some time at the Academy. He accepted their invitation; and went to reside at Duffield, in Aug. 1812: when the society consisted of ninety members.

For a few subsequent years, the cause was supported with increasing success and great harmony. They carried the gospel to Shottle, an adjacent village; and met with much encouragement. In 1816, they purchased a house at Wirksworth, a market town about nine miles north-east of Duffield; and opened one of its large rooms for preaching; which they commenced under favourable auspices. About the same time, Mr. Barrow removing to a place near Turnditch, commenced a weekly lecture in one of his outhouses. While they were thus enlarging their borders, a difference arose amongst them, respecting some parts of church order, which caused an unpleasant altercation. Harmony, however, being soon restored, Mr. Ingham

was called to the office of pastor. He was ordained, June 19th, 1819, when Mr. R. Smith delivered the charge to the minister, from 2 Tim. ii. 16; and Mr. James Taylor addressed the church, from 2 Cor. vii. 16. There were then two hundred and three members; of whom forty three had been baptized, in the preceding year. Their prospects were encouraging, and their hearers increasing, so that most of their places for preaching were too small to accommodate them. Their worthy friend Mr. Barrow, who had been much blest as an instrument in breaking up new ground, still continued his useful labours with zeal and activity.

The removal of Mr. W. Pickering from *Ashford*,* cast a deep gloom over the general baptist interest in that place. On this event, Mr. Robert Bradbury, one of their own members, who a few years before had been called to the work of the ministry, was requested to assist them in a more regular manner. But his temporal circumstances prevented him from devoting so much of his time to the sacred work as the cause required; and compelled him successively to discontinue his visits to Bradwell, Abney and Wardlow. Preaching was indeed introduced into Lingston, near Ashford; yet the cause visibly declined. Frequent applications were made to the Association for assistance, and various of the ministers from sister churches visited them. But the distance of the situation rendered these visits unfrequent; and no permanent effect appears to have been produced. Coldness and disaffection increased, and, in 1811, a division took place in this small

* Supra p. 269.

but scattered society. The friends at Abney and Bradwell, formed one church of nine members; and those at Ashford and its environs, another of about twenty.

After this division, the church at Ashford experienced a transient revival: eight persons joined it during the following year. Death, however, deprived them of several of their most valuable and useful members; and, in 1814, Mr. Bradbury declined the work of the ministry. A promising young member, who had occasionally assisted in preaching, stept forwards in this exigency; and endeavoured to supply the congregation. But his domestic duties not permitting him to devote much time, either to preparation for the pulpit or to the sacred work itself, he laboured under great disadvantages. In 1816, the number had decreased to sixteen; but it is pleasing to observe, that they then hoped "that vital religion was gaining ground, as their meetings were better attended."

The few friends at *Abney* and *Bradwell*, who seceded from Ashford, in 1811, were, for some time, supplied by the ministers from Yorkshire; but the distance and expence of these supplies prevented the continuance of them. They afterwards obtained assistance from two occasional ministers at Sheffield, who visited them, once a fortnight, till 1815. What was their state afterwards does not appear; but it is probable, that in 1817, their number had never exceeded nine.

Austrey is a large village in Warwickshire, about nine miles south-west of *Ashby-de-la-zouch*. Like too many of the country places in that neighbourhood, it had long been involved

in great ignorance as to religious subjects. "Darkness had covered the earth and gross darkness the people." Various attempts had been made by other denominations to introduce the gospel into this village; but the rage of persecution and the want of support had rendered them unsuccessful. In the beginning of 1802, Mr. Goadby, the general baptist minister of Packington, had an occasional interview with Mr. J. Barnes, a respectable inhabitant of Austrey; who, from an early acquaintance with a worthy member of the church at Castle-Donington, had learnt something of the truths of christianity. Mr. Goadby turned the conversation on the deplorable neglect of religion which prevailed in Mr. Barnes' neighbourhood: and enquired if the latter would permit him to go and preach in his house: to which he replied, that he would think of it. The effects of this interview were important. Mr. Barnes went to Packington to hear the gospel; was happily convinced of its truth and value; and offered himself a candidate for baptism. He professed his obedience to Christ in this ordinance, May 15th. 1802. On the succeeding Lord's-day, May 22nd, Mr. Goadby went to Austrey; and preached his first sermon, in Mr. Barnes' wool-room, from 1 Tim. i. 15. This room, being large and convenient, was licensed and furnished with the necessary accommodations for a place of worship.

These attempts were crowned with success. Many attended the preaching of the gospel, and some from distant places. Several respectable inhabitants of Austrey joined the church at Packington; especially Mr. J. Barnes, jun. the son of the first convert. Preaching was successfully introduced into various of the dark villages in

the vicinity, and the prospect was encouraging. But the distance from Packington and the number of other places which the preachers of that society had to supply, rendered it impossible for them to give that attention to this neighbourhood which its importance required. The friends therefore determined to take the cause into their own hands; and Aug. 7th. 1808, were formed into a distinct church, by Mr. S. Deacon, of Barton. Their number then was fifteen.

This infant society had to struggle with many difficulties and was surrounded with enemies. The members endeavoured to obtain an acceptable minister; and invited Mr. Jarvis, of Longford, to their assistance. He removed to Austrey; but, in about a year, left them again destitute. For some time, supplies were obtained from Barton; till Mr. Barnes, jun. impelled by the necessity of the case, attempted to give a word of exhortation to his brethren. His services were acceptable, and he became the regular minister. For several years, he steadily and diligently pursued his great work; but though his labours were generally attended by numerous auditors, yet few declared themselves on the Lord's side. The members however were united, and zealous in their endeavours to spread the news of salvation on every side. The good seed, which they had been sowing in hope, at length produced most cheering fruit. Additions to their number were frequent; and in the four years previous to 1817, one hundred and one persons were baptized on a profession of faith. The members of this society then amounted to one hundred and thirty one. They maintained preaching at nine places; and had large congregations at each. Preparations were making for erecting a meeting-house

at Polesworth, a neighbouring village, at which the prospect was peculiarly encouraging.

Beeston is a large and populous village, five miles north-west of Nottingham, in which no dissenters had established themselves till towards the close of the last century; when the Methodists obtained a few votaries, and erected a small chapel. At Chilwell, a little place near Beeston, Mr. W. Pickering, of Ilkiston, had frequently preached, and there two members of his church resided. At their invitation, several of their neighbours had accompanied them to Ilkiston, and had found the preaching of the gospel blessed to their souls. This encouraged the preachers at Ilkiston to visit this village more frequently; and the happy result was, that thirteen of the inhabitants of Chilwell professed their faith in Christ; were baptized, and joined the church at Ilkiston. But the affecting death of Mr. Twells,*

* This eminent Christian was, for twenty years, an honourable, active and useful member of the church at Ilkiston. He was very lively in religion, and enjoyed, in an extraordinary degree, the assurance of his interest in Christ. Though he never affected to be considered as a preacher, yet he was in the practice of going about to neighbouring villages to hold meetings for prayer and reading: and, for some of the last years of his life, he took frequent opportunities of addressing the people in a manner that evinced a deep sense of the wretched state of sinners, an ardent desire to promote their eternal welfare, and a strong attachment to the doctrines of the cross. These addresses were often blest to the souls of those who heard them. He was called to his reward, Oct. 2nd. 1803, in the forty-sixth year of his age.—Having to descend to inspect a coal-pit, through a defect in the machinery by which he was suspended, he was precipitated suddenly to the bottom, a depth of more than thirty yards, and received so much injury that he died in two days. He left a widow and seven children.

and the removal of Mr. Stevenson, so diminished the number of ministers in that society, that it was found impossible to continue their usual labours at Chilwell: and indeed the house was shut against them in which they had been accustomed to assemble. This cast a deep gloom over the prospect; and the friends who could remove had already determined to fix their habitations in some place where they might more conveniently enjoy the means of grace.

At this juncture, Mr. Thomas Rogers,* who was then the assistant preacher in the church at Nottingham, determined, from motives of economy, to settle at Beeston and open a school. This he effected in Oct. 1803. Desiring that his family should have an opportunity of hearing the gospel, and being zealous to promote the eternal interests of his neighbours, he soon obtained permission to preach in a dwelling house at Beeston, which was occupied by a methodist; and not long afterwards a door was opened for his visiting Chilwell. For some time, he maintained regular service, on Monday evenings, at each of these villages in rotation; which were attended with an encouraging number of hearers.

Mr. Rogers being convinced that, with proper exertions, an interest might be raised in this

* Mr. Rogers joined the church at Nottingham, in 1792, and began to preach, May 16th. 1783. He was much employed, in subsequent years, in the villages about Nottingham, and in supplying neighbouring congregations. He frequently visited Ilkiston, after Mr. Goddard's secession; and in conjunction with Mr. Whittle, was very instrumental in improving the cause at Widmerpool and Broughton, which was then in its infancy and struggling under great difficulties. In 1799, his friends called him to assist Mr. Smith in the labours of the pulpit, and he retained that situation till his removal to Beeston.

neighbourhood, relinquished his engagement with the friends at Nottingham, and resolved to devote his undivided attention to this object. The house at Beeston, in which public worship was commenced, being inconvenient he, with the approbation of his landlord, fitted up a large room in his own house for the purpose, which was opened, Jan. 1st. 1804. The attendance became numerous; and several professed to be convinced of the truth. It was, therefore, thought necessary to endeavour to form a society which might regularly receive these converts into fellowship. The church at Ilkiston declining to dismiss their members who resided at Chilwell, eight members of Nottingham church, four of whom dwelt at Beeston and four others at a short distance, were cordially dismissed to lay the foundation of a new interest. Mr. R. Smith went over to Beeston, March 4th. 1804; and delivered a most affectionate exhortation to the members of this infant church, and afterwards preached to a crowded and attentive auditory. The few friends who had thus united were soon afterwards joined by the thirteen members of Ilkiston church at Chilwell, and two members of another society who were settled in the vicinity. May 20th. five candidates, the fruits of Mr. Rogers' ministry, were accepted by the church, and baptized in a pond, in Mr. Rogers' croft, amidst a large concourse of well behaved spectators. On July 27th. twelve other persons were baptized; and, Oct. 21st. following, fifteen others made, in the same manner, a public profession of their faith. Almost every week, during many succeeding months, one or more professing to be convinced of their sins, desired communion with this increasing society; and early in 1805,

twenty persons were baptized in one day, and added to the church. Most of these candidates were arrived at years of maturity, and some were advanced in life. In many cases, husbands and wives, and, in more than one instance, whole families, gave themselves up together to the Lord and to his people.

This society having thus increased to eighty members, and the congregation being proportionably numerous, the room in which they assembled became too small to accommodate them. As a temporary expedient, Mr. Regers occupied a barn which was then empty; and though it was cold and very inconvenient, it was soon filled with serious hearers. It was, therefore, a matter of urgent necessity, that some more suitable place of worship should be provided. The subject was laid before the Midland Conference and the annual Association; and both these assemblies recommended the erection of a new meeting-house. Weekly subscriptions were immediately commenced by the friends at Beeston; and the neighbouring churches liberally assisted in the design. A piece of ground was purchased, and a commodious edifice raised, which was opened, Aug. 24th. 1806. On this occasion, three dissenting ministers from Nottingham, of different sentiments, cordially engaged. Mr. R. Smith, a general baptist, preached in the morning; Mr. Alliott, an independent, in the afternoon; and Mr. Jarman, a particular baptist, in the evening. The utmost harmony prevailed; the place was crowded on all parts of the day; and the collections at the door were liberal. The whole cost of the building was upwards of four hundred pounds.

The church continued to increase; and Mr. Ro-

gers, who had been chosen an elder, was desired to administer the ordinances. It was, however, judged necessary to invest him, in a more formal manner, with the pastoral office. He was, therefore, publickly ordained, May 20th. 1807 ; when Mr. Felkin delivered the introductory discourse, Mr. R. Smith gave the charge to the minister, and Mr. W. Pickering addressed the people. But the progress of the cause afterwards was less rapid. Domestic bereavements induced Mr. Rogers to remove his residence to Nottingham : and, though he continued to preach regularly at Beeston, yet he could not so incessantly watch over the interests of his friends there, as when he dwelt in the midst of them. In 1810, he settled at Stapleford, a village three miles south-west of Beeston ; and commenced preaching in his own house, with a view to strengthen the cause at Beeston. In the following year, he extended his labours to Long-Eaton, another village at nearly the same distance west of Beeston. At both these places there was an encouraging attendance; and a small chapel was built at Stapleford by a friend, who let it to the church on reasonable terms.

But the public distress, which was felt in all parts of the nation, began now to press heavily on the friends at Beeston, and especially on their pastor ; whose means of support were, in a great measure, intercepted. His people saw with pain the injury that his domestic circumstances were receiving ; and, though unanimously desirous of his continuance with them, they thought it justice to set him at liberty from his engagements. This they did : and he received invitations from several other churches to remove to them. But, being sincerely attached to his

friends, he determined to make every effort before he forsook them. He struggled on till Christmas, 1813; when, finding it impossible to subsist at Beeston, he accepted the call of the church at Fleet, in Lincolnshire. The society at Beeston then consisted of one hundred and one members.

Though the removal of their highly esteemed pastor checked the progress of this rising cause; yet the congregations continued to be encouraging and several persons soon afterwards joined the church. Peace and unanimity were preserved in their councils: and, for a time, supplies were kindly afforded them by the neighbouring congregations. Mr. Bull at length became their more regular preacher, and the cause seemed to prosper in his hands. But, in 1817, the stagnation of trade and dearness of provisions affected them severely; and obliged them to suspend their efforts at Stapleton and Long-Eaton; though they had previously collected large congregations at each of these places. They therefore confined their public labours to Beeston, where they preached thrice on the Lord's-day; and, in the afternoon, had a numerous auditory. The members then amounted to one hundred and six.

We have already observed,* that, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, there existed a cluster of general baptist churches in Cheshire, and the adjacent counties, which were then numerous and respectable. The society at *Nantwich*, a considerable market town in Cheshire, appears to have been of note amongst them. It probably owed its prosperity, if not its forma-

* Supra, p. 262.—Note.

tion, to Mr. Samuel Acton, who, for many years, presided over it with great diligence and success. He was by trade a tobacconist, and possessed some property ; the ground on which the meeting-house stands having been presented by him to the church. We have no information when he began his ministry ; but it was probably before 1688.* The ground, which we have just mentioned, was conveyed to him, Sept. 19th. 1695 ; and he was then established in trade. In 1704, he published a treatise, which he called, "Fruit from Canaan; or Foretastes of Glory : in several Discourses on Assurance," from Heb. vi. 9. At that time, he was a leading man among his

In 1718, Mr. Acton published a small piece, which he called, "Naked Truth : or, a Plea for Union." In this he describes himself as "a man in years;" and says that "he had, for more than forty years, lamented the inconveniences arising from needless contentions ; and, for more than thirty years, had been striving, though to little purpose, to persuade christians to lay them aside." The worthy author's object is to promote an union between the general and particular baptists. In order to this, he briefly but perspicuously states the views of the former, on those points in which they differ from the latter ; and endeavours to prove that they are agreeable to scripture. "The principal and main points of difference," he says, "are these four. 1. God's Decree about Election and Reprobation. 2 The Universal Love of God to Man. 3. General Redemption by Jesus Christ. 4. The Certainty of Perseverance." This pamphlet excited a considerable sensation in the neighbourhood ; and his opponents there, not thinking themselves qualified to refute it, sent it to their friends in London. The author, therefore, in the following year, published "An Appendix to Naked Truth :" in which he endeavours to strengthen his sentiments, by additional arguments. We notice this work to shew, that the heresy of the general baptists, in these parts, was then confined to the points connected with personal Election, and did not extend to the more important subjects of the Divinity and Atonement of Jesus Christ. This is still more clearly evinced by the agreement of the church at Nantwich with Mr. Kimber, alluded to already, in the Note to page 262.

friends; and dedicates this book “to the churches of God in Cheshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire,” &c. From this dedication, we learn, that he had previously experienced violent persecution, probably of a religious nature. He addresses his brethren thus: “Glad I am of any opportunity to signify the grateful acknowledgments of my soul, for your love in striving together with me and for me, in your prayers to God ; whereby I firmly believe my deliverance was furthered, from the violence of them who rose up against me, and threatened my ruin, without cause. But since I have escaped, as a bird from the snare of the fowler, I cannot but warble forth the praises of God, who has pleaded my cause, and given me so pleasing an issue ; by restraining the wrath and turning away the insults of those who would have rejoiced in an opportunity to have triumphed over me. To Him, therefore, must the vow be performed, which strongly binds me more diligently to minister in the place where God by his providence has set me.”

Mr. Acton’s abilities and character were highly esteemed by his contemporaries, and he was frequently appointed to preach at their associations. Several of the discourses which he delivered, on these occasions, were printed : and, in 1723, being prevented by indisposition from attending the association, he published the sermon which he had designed to preach, from Psal. iv. 3, under the title of “The Lord’s Favourite.” It is probable, that he was then advancing towards old age; as, in the following year, the church invited Mr. Isaac Kimber, of London, to settle with them as a minister; “upon the reasonable supposition,” as they express it, “from brother Acton’s age and very sensible decays, that the church would, ere

long, want a man to minister to them in his room, in the word and ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the furtherance of their edification and salvation." In this measure, the zealous old man cordially acquiesced; and himself subscribed ten pounds annually towards Mr. Kimber's support. The agreement was dated, July 8th. 1724; and signed by twelve sisters, and twenty-two brethren: the principal of whom, if we judge from the amount of their subscriptions, were John Goodall, John Wright, Ralph Orton and James Maddock.

Mr. Kimber did not reside long at Nantwich. Difference of sentiment, on some important points of doctrine, caused a separation; and he returned to London. How long Mr. Acton survived, is not known; but, in a good old age, he was called to the church above; and his remains were deposited in the meeting-house.* Many of his most useful and respectable friends were removed about the same time; and the cause appears to have gradually declined. Not being able to procure ministers of their own persuasion, the church permitted Mr. Pine, a particular baptist, to occupy the pulpit: but his distinguishing tenets not being approved by the people,

* In 1714, Mr. Acton published a pamphlet, containing three sermons. 1. "The Christian's Salvation all of Grace," from Eph. ii. 5.—2. "Christ's Ministers Soul Compellers," from Luke xiv. 23—3. "Wise Men but Fools in rejecting God's Word," from Jer. viii. 9. During the printing of this volume, queen Anne died, and George I. was quietly called to the throne. The author took the opportunity of adding a Postscript, addressed to "Dissenters in general," in which, after cautioning them "not to wrap themselves up in a groundless fancy that the king was coming to single them out for his favourites," and advising them to behave themselves discreetly in the favourable change of affairs, he concludes thus: "Whatever others do, I hope you, my

he was, not without difficulty, dismissed. Not long afterwards, the methodists obtained possession of the meeting-house ; and, for many years, enjoyed the use of it without interruption.

Before the close of the eighteenth century, all traces of the general baptists had nearly disappeared : not one person being left at Nantwich, who professed to be of that denomination. Two members of the church at Barton were then in the habit of frequently visiting Nantwich on business ; and formed an acquaintance with Mr. John Cooper and some others, who were zealously attached to the methodists. On comparing their sentiments on religious subjects, they found a considerable coincidence, except on the point of believers' baptism : and this topic was, of course, frequently discussed between them. The Nantwich friends, at length, yielded the victory to their opponents ; and professed themselves willing to evince their sincerity by being baptized. This result was reported to the church at Barton : and that society, thinking it deserved attention, requested Mr. J. Deacon to visit Nantwich, and make further enquiries. He went, in Sept. 1812, and learnt, that the meeting-house occupied by the methodists belonged to the ge-

brethren of the baptized churches, will distinguish yourselves by loyalty, modesty and peaceful behaviour, as becomes a people worthy of your privileges and of such a king : whose reign let the God of heaven grant to be long, glorious and happy, to and over all his people. Amen."—The good man had felt the miseries of the tyranny of the Stuarts, and duly appreciated the blessings of the Protestant succession.

The other publications of this minister are—"Slowness to Anger the truest Gallantry," from Prov. xvi. 32. 1713.—"The Royal Charge," from 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. 1715.—"To honour God the sure Way to Honour," from 1 Sam. ii. 30.—"Union with Christ our Hope of Glory," from Col. i. 27. 1721.

neral baptists, and that only two of the trustees survived. On his return, he laid the subject before the midland conference at Loughborough : and it was there agreed, to nominate eleven persons as trustees, to whom the property might be transferred ; and to request Mr. R. Smith to take a journey to forward the business. This he did, in December following ; and succeeded in recovering the meeting-house.

On the 17th of the succeeding month, Mr. T. Stevenson, of Loughborough, baptized three persons at Nantwich, and formed them into a church. The ministers from the midland and Yorkshire districts visited them as often as circumstances would permit ; and Mr. Cooper, one of their number, was encouraged to preach for them in the intervals. Before the Association in 1813, nine had been baptized ; and this infant society was then enrolled on the list of churches forming the New Connection. In subsequent years, many others were admitted : but, owing to the ravages of death, and the disgraceful conduct of some who went back to the world, the number of members remained nearly stationary. The interest, however, gained ground : and June, 1817, they make this encouraging report. “The general baptist cause here wears a more favourable aspect than it did. We are peaceable and united, and trust that vital religion is reviving amongst us.” The labours of Mr. Cooper and his friends had then been extended to Torperly, a large village ten miles north-west of Nantwich ; where seven persons were baptized, Sept. 14th. 1817.

Knipton is a village in the north-east of Leicestershire, bordering on Lincolnshire. At this place there is an ancient society of general bap-

tists, the origin of which we have not been able to ascertain. In the early part of the eighteenth century, it was under the care of Mr. John Wortley. He was succeeded by Mr. John Bissill; and the church then consisted of about thirty members. After Mr. Bissill's decease, Mr. T. Smart, the minister at Wimeswould and Mountsorrel, occasionally supplied them with preaching, till Mr. R. Stokes settled amongst them. While he laboured for them, the meeting-house was built. This was scarcely finished, when he removed to London: and they were again kindly assisted by their former friends at Wimeswould. In 1769, this church joined the Lincolnshire Association. It was then destitute of a pastor; and remained, in the same state, in 1771. Mr. Boyce, the messenger, was requested to visit it, as often as convenient; and that active minister cheerfully complied with their request. This society was then respectable; consisting of between fifty and sixty members, two deacons, and one stated unordained preacher. The minister was, probably, Mr. Joseph Proud, jun. from Wisbeach; who attended the Association both these years, and is ranked among "the brethren in the ministry." Mr. Proud remained with them only three or four years, and then left them without supply. They once more turned to the ministers at Wimeswould for assistance, and appear to have been, for some time, united with that church: as they tell the Lincolnshire Association, in 1788, that "they were well attended both at Wimeswould and Knipton." At that time, their number was reduced to thirty-six: and they were under the pastoral care of Mr. W. Kelsey, who attended the same Association, in 1785, as "the elder of the church at Knipton." Mr. Kelsey continued to

preside over this people eleven years, till towards the close of the eighteenth century, when discontent arose in the society : his temporal circumstances became embarrassed ; and his abilities were enfeebled by age. A separation followed. Mr. John Bissill, one of their members, was, about this time, called to exercise his gifts in preaching; and, for a season, assisted in supplying the pulpit : but he soon left them ; and, in 1799, went to pursue his studies at the Academy.

The cause appears to have been then in a low state, as, in 1801, there were but sixteen members. These were frequently visited by Mr. Hoe, of Hose, who preached for them every fortnight, for four or five years: and his labours appear to have been very useful. As he was united to the New Connection, he advised them to leave the Lincolnshire Association, and attach themselves to his friends. Accordingly, in 1800, they applied for admission into the New Connection : and, the following year, were received. After this, there appeared transient symptoms of a revival : eight persons being baptized in 1802. But Mr. Hoe discontinuing his visits, they speedily declined : and want of preachers, joined to neglect of discipline, had, in 1814, diminished their number of members to ten. They were then in a deplorable state ; having been deprived of preaching during the whole year, except two or three occasional sermons. In these dark circumstances, their only two male brethren united, to conduct a prayer-meeting on the Lord's-day. In 1816, Mr. J. Turner settled among them as their regular preacher ; and they began to hope for better times : but, in the following year, he removed ; and they were again left without the regular mi-

nistry of the word. Their number was then but eleven.

SECT. 2.—*A Sketch of the History of the Churches in the Northern District, from A.D. 1800 to A.D. 1817.*

For a short time after the commencement of the nineteenth century, affairs in the church at *Birchcliff** went on prosperously; their congregations were large, and additions frequent. But the conduct of their pastor soon became inconsistent with his profession, and caused much trouble and dissatisfaction. In Jan. 1803, he abruptly left the neighbourhood; and was excluded from their fellowship. Supplies were, at first, obtained from the neighbouring churches, and the peace of the society was restored; and they soon turned their eyes to Mr. James Taylor, of Derby, and made some unsuccessful efforts to obtain him. Thus disappointed, they requested Mr. W. Hollinrake, a respectable member of their body, to exercise his talents in preaching; and, being satisfied with his attempts, called him to the work of the ministry. He then joined with the other ministers in supplying their own pulpit, and was often invited to preach for sister congregations. His labours, both at home and abroad, were acceptable; and, under the divine blessing, rendered very useful. His friends already began to look on him as likely to supply their need. He wished, however, to avail himself of the advantages offered by the Academy, and went to London, July, 1804: where he spent a year under

* *Supra*, p. 271.

Mr. D. Taylor. During his residence there, he was invited, by his brethren, to accept the office of pastor ; and, after proper deliberation, complied. He returned to Birchcliff, and commenced his regular labours there, July 30th. 1805.

Soon after his return, symptoms of discontent shewed themselves, which ; for a season, caused great uneasiness and much discouragement, both to himself and his friends. But the majority, being satisfied that, in supporting him, they were following the leadings of divine Providence, determined to persevere : and the numbers who crowded to hear him, with the frequent instances of his discourses being blest to the awakening of his auditors, strengthened them in their resolution. He was accordingly ordained to the pastoral office, July 1st. 1806; when Mr. D. Taylor, of London, gave the charge, and Mr. E. Whitaker, of Melbourn, addressed the people. Though these proceedings were warmly approved by a decided majority of the society, yet a respectable minority doubted of their propriety : and, as it did not appear probable that they could cordially co-operate in carrying on the cause of the Redeemer, they resolved to separate from their former friends. When this resolution was fully taken, the parties met, by mutual agreement ; and, commanding each other, in affectionate prayer, to the favour of God, took a friendly leave. After this division, about eighty members remained at Birchcliff.

From this period, the cause of the Redeemer prospered in this place ; and Mr. Hollinrake's labours were abundantly blest. The congregations increased, both in number and respectability : and, from the return of their pastor from the Academy to June 1817, upwards of two

hundred persons had been baptized and added to the church. And though death had deprived them of many useful and pious members; and they had, in some painful instances, been obliged to withdraw from such as walked disorderly; yet their number then amounted to one hundred and ninety-nine. They enjoyed peace among themselves; their congregations were large; and they had two assistant preachers.—In 1808, a piece of ground was presented to this society, by a neighbouring gentlemen, by which the burying-ground was enlarged, at an expence of nearly forty pounds.

The persons who withdrew from the church at Birchcliff in the commencement of 1807, amounted to forty-two. They united to carry on the cause of the Redeemer; and engaged an old meeting-house* at *Heptonstall-Stack*, about a mile and a half distant from Birchcliff. In this building, they commenced public worship, and obtained supplies from Queenshead and Halifax. The congregations were encouraging; and it soon became evident to all parties, that the separation would prove advantageous to the interest of religion in the neighbourhood. This persuasion had a happy tendency to remove

* This meeting-house had existed almost a century. Mr. Thomas Greenwood, a gentleman of the neighbourhood, built it, and preached in it. After his death, it was frequently unoccupied. Mr. R. Thomas, for a long time, laboured alternately here and at Rodwell-End: and Mr. (afterwards Dr.) Fawcett preached in it regularly, till his new place of worship was erected at Hebden-bridge. From that time, it lay almost useless, till the seceders from Birchcliff obtained possession of it. After the opening of their new place at Slack, it was employed as a school through the week, and afforded good accommodation for their Sunday-scholars on the Lord's-days.

opposition, and to procure this attempt the countenance of all who wished for the extension of the kingdom of the Redeemer. The friends at Slack naturally desired a settled minister, and soon turned their attention to Mr. James Taylor of Derby. The subject was brought before the Association at Nottingham, in 1807; and that assembly encouraged his removal. Accordingly he settled at Slack, in October following.

Mr. Taylor's character and labours being well approved, the cause gained ground rapidly: the congregations increased so as to be much too large for the old meeting-house; and several joined the church. All ranks of persons in the neighbourhood wished success to the rising interest, and evinced a disposition to encourage it. In these favourable circumstances, the friends thought it advisable to provide a more commodious place of worship. They obtained, from the gentlemen of Heptonstall, the grant of a piece of ground from the common, in a very eligible and conspicuous situation. On this they erected a substantial and convenient meeting-house; to which were attached a spacious burying-ground and a handsome baptistery. The place was opened, Oct. 6th. 1808, by Mr. John Taylor, of Queenshead, with a discourse from Eph. ii. 21. The expence of the meeting-house and burying-ground was nearly seven hundred pounds; exclusive of a dwelling-house for the minister, which was built at the same time.— After the erection of the meeting-house, the cause continued to advance: but Mr. Taylor could not soon be induced to assume the pastoral office over this affectionate people. At length, he determined to devote himself to their service; and was solemnly set apart, Oct. 25th. 1810:

when Mr. Hollinrake opened the service, by reading the scriptures and prayer; M. John Taylor gave the charge to his son, from 1 Tim. i. 18; and Mr. D. Taylor, of London, addressed the church, from 1 Thess. v. 13. On the following Lord's-day, seven brethren were ordained to the office of deacons; to whom Mr. John Taylor delivered a charge, from 1 Tim. iii. 13.

The church, being thus regularly organized, carried on the blessed cause in which they were engaged with vigour; and the Lord was pleased to crown their exertions with success. The congregations were numerous, and the members increased with rapidity. Prior to the Association, in 1817, one hundred and fifty-seven had been baptized; and the society then consisted of one hundred and seventy-seven members. Harmony prevailed in their deliberations, and the neighbours continued to be friendly. They had then four assistant ministers whom they had called to the work, and who were well approved.

The small church at *Shore*,* under Mr. J. Spencer, experienced a considerable revival in the commencement of the nineteenth century. The pastor applied with diligence and zeal to the duties of his office; and increased in usefulness and respectability. Their congregations, considering the situation, were numerous; and the number of additions encouraging. In 1807, the members had increased from nine to forty-three; and a pleasing degree of harmony and affection reigned amongst them. But the infirmities and age of Mr. Spencer, who had now

* Supra p. 272.

reached his seventieth year, checked this growing prosperity. The cause drooped in his feeble hands; few were converted; and the hearers diminished. In 1817, their number was reduced to thirty-six: and though they were then tolerably peaceful amongst themselves; yet the state of religion was low.

In 1800, we left the church at *Queenshead** oppressed with poverty, and their pastor incapable, from bodily infirmities, of those strenuous labours in which he had formerly been abundant. This depression continued for a few subsequent years; and was increased by disunion and disaffection among themselves: so that, in 1803, their number had sunk to fifty-seven. But, about that time, a pleasing change took place. Harmony and affection were restored to their councils; and their esteem and love to their pastor revived. His labours, therefore, were more useful; the congregations increased, and many were added to the church. In order to accommodate the numerous hearers, two side galleries, as large as the meeting-house would admit, were erected, and other alterations made. The expences of these improvements were borne by the friends, with the liberal assistance of their neighbours, who shewed a strong disposition to encourage them. In 1807, the progress of the cause here was checked by the building of three places of worship by the methodists, within less than a mile of the meeting-house at *Queenshead*. This naturally lessened the hearers, and divided the attention of the neighbours. The effect, however, was only temporary: in a few years, their

* Supra p. 244.

hearers again became numerous and additions frequent. Though death deprived them of many valuable members, and some forsook the good way; the cause of the Redeemer still gained strength. The pastor, indeed, grew every year less capable of active exertions; but, with a few short interruptions, he was enabled to fill the pulpit on the Lord's-day and to superintend the concerns of the church. The kindness of his friends excused and supplied his lack of service; and he had the uncommon felicity of seeing that cause, over which he had watched for so many years with a parent's anxiety, and for which he had long laboured with persevering assiduity, revive in his old age, and flourish in his weakness. In 1814, seven deacons were ordained, to manage the temporal concerns of the society; and three young men, whom they had called to the work of the ministry, were acceptably engaged in preaching the gospel. In 1817, the number of members had increased to one hundred and forty-two. In that year, they, in conjunction with the ministers of neighbouring churches, commenced preaching, with some encouraging prospect of success, at Apperley Bridge, a village about nine miles south-east of Queenshead.

The church at *Halifax** continued under the pastoral care of Mr. Joseph Ellis, during the first seventeen years of the nineteenth century. In the former part of that period, the cause was low and discouraging; but a pleasing degree of unanimity prevailed amongst the members. In 1805, the meeting-house was altered and repaired, at a considerable expence; which was cheerfully de-

* *Supra* p. 276.

frayed by the subscriptions of the friends and neighbours. They hoped that this step would be advantageous to the drooping interest; and their hopes were not wholly disappointed. From that time, the hearers gradually increased, and several came forwards from time, to time, and joined the church. In 1817, fourteen were baptized on a profession of faith. And, though the peace of the society was repeatedly interrupted by internal dissensions, which caused some of the members to withdraw from its fellowship, and several valuable friends were removed by death, yet the cause continued to gain ground. In 1817, this society consisted of seventy-one members, who were peaceful and unanimous.

The few friends at *Burnley** experienced great discouragement during the period now under review. The character of Mr. Folds was so unstable and irregular, that, in 1804, they were compelled to withdraw from him, both as a member and a minister. Another person was then employed to preach for them, and they ventured to repair the meeting-house. The expence increased their former debt to a sum which, though small in itself, was a grievous burden to the few poor friends who supported the cause in this place. To add to their depression, their minister's character and pursuits were found to be totally inconsistent with his sacred profession; and, in 1807, they were obliged to dismiss him from their fellowship. At this time, the interest of religion, which had received so many dreadful wounds in the house of its friends, was almost expiring. The number of members was reduced

* Supra p. 380.

to ten; and the hearts of those few who still stood in the breach fainted within them. They resolved, however, to continue the struggle, and invited assistance from the Yorkshire churches. This mode of supply was continued for upwards of two years, and produced a happy effect. In the beginning of 1810, Mr. George Dean, who had for some time been an assistant preacher in the church at Queenshead, being repeatedly invited by this society and advised by the Yorkshire Conference, removed with his family to Burnley, and became their regular minister. His labours were well approved, and the people exerted themselves to render his situation comfortable. This long depressed cause shewed symptoms of a revival, and some respectable neighbours appeared disposed to countenance it. In 1817, the number of members had risen to twenty-five, among whom peace and harmony prevailed; and the prospect of future prosperity was encouraging.

Towards the conclusion of this period, the friends at Shore had observed, that many persons attended their public worship from the valley that stretches towards Todmorden, and even from places beyond that village. This induced the friends of religion to turn their attention to those parts; and Mr. James Taylor visited Todmorden, and preached there, Dec. 3rd. 1814. A worthy individual, encouraged by the prospect of usefulness, exerted himself with great zeal to obtain the assistance of a few friends in establishing regular preaching in this neighbourhood. After considerable perseverance this was effected; and a room was hired at a place called *Lidgate*, about two miles from Shore. The subject was

laid before the Yorkshire Conference and several ministers engaged to supply the place in rotation, for some months to come. As supplies could be obtained only for the morning and evening, the friends were advised to employ the afternoon in an experience meeting. This greatly assisted those who had turned their faces towards Zion, by accelerating their growth in grace and knowledge. These young christians soon began to wish for the privileges of church-fellowship ; and presented a case to the Conference at Shore, Aug. 27th. 1816 ; soliciting directions how to obtain them. After due consideration, it was concluded, that it would be advisable to form them into a distinct church ; and Messrs. Ellis, Hollinrake, Hodgson and Dean, were requested to visit Lidgate, and carry this advice into effect. Accordingly, Nov. 30th. 1816, they went, and baptized eight persons ; whom they formed into a society, and to whom Mr. Ellis administered the Lord's supper. The spectators and auditors behaved with seriousness and attention, and the solemnity was pleasing and edifying. In June, 1817, this infant church consisted of eleven members ; who were peaceful and unanimous, and whose prospects were encouraging.

Stayley-Bridge is a populous and genteel manufacturing village in Lancashire, on the borders of Cheshire ; about eight miles east of Manchester. To this place, Mr. Barker wandered, when he had left Birchcliff ; and procured a creditable situation in a factory. As he still pushed himself amongst professors of religion, the methodists engaged him to preach for them on Christmas-day, 1804. This arrangement being made by the people without consulting

their leaders, the latter interfered after the morning service, and prevented him from preaching in the evening. Some of his associates, thinking him not well used on this occasion, determined to support his cause. The necessary measures were taken; and, in a few weeks, he commenced public worship in a large room in his own occupation, and soon became popular. At first, he ranked with no particular denomination; but, in 1806, he declared himself a general baptist. Towards the close of 1808, he baptized twelve persons and formed a church. His hearers increased rapidly: and a more capacious place of worship became necessary, and was obtained. The number of members soon rose to upwards of sixty, and every thing appeared prosperous.

But the prospect soon darkened. In 1813, twelve of their members, disapproving of the principles and conduct of the preacher, withdrew from their communion and formed a distinct society, which afterwards attached itself to the particular baptists. In the following year, this church and its founder applied to the Association at Birchcliff for admission into the New Connection; but that assembly promptly refused to form any union with them. Soon after this application, the conduct of the preacher gave painful evidence, that he was totally unfit for the station he had assumed, and a separation ensued between him and the people. This disgraceful event, plunged these young professors into the utmost perplexity. Many forsook them, and turned to the world: but, there was a goodly number who were earnestly engaged with their Saviour, and could not desert his cause. They were depressed with reproach and sorrow, and knew not how to attempt to support

the sinking interest. These affecting circumstances being reported to the Yorkshire churches, their ministers generously stept forwards, and endeavoured to collect and organize this scattered flock. Their visits, which were regularly repeated for many months, produced the happiest effects: the congregations increased; several joined the church; and the friends of the truth began to assume new courage.

The Yorkshire ministers continued to supply them, till the Association, in 1815; when they laid the case of this rising interest before that assembly. In consequence of the information and advice which Mr. W. Pickering received on that occasion, he removed with his family to Stayley-bridge, towards the close of the year; and became their regular minister. At the following Association, this church was admitted into the New Connection: when the number of members was sixty; of whom, twelve had been baptized and nine restored, during the preceding year. In 1817, their members were increased to eighty: they then enjoyed peace, and religion was advancing among them. Their public seasons of divine worship and their more private meetings were well attended; and they had introduced preaching into Ashton-under-line. One young man among them had been called forth to preach the gospel, and promised to be useful and acceptable.

From this hasty glance of the proceedings of these churches, it appears that the general baptist cause had made a pleasing progress, in the northern district, during the first seventeen years of the nineteenth century. The number of societies had indeed only risen from six to eight;

but the members which composed these churches, who, in 1800, amounted only to one hundred and ninety-two, had, in 1817, augmented to seven hundred and forty-one: and in most places the prospect of future prosperity was highly encouraging.

SECT. 3.—*A Sketch of the History of the Churches in Lincolnshire and the adjacent Counties, from A.D. 1800 to A.D. 1817.*

IN the first seventeen years of the nineteenth century, death made awful inroads on the church at *Boston*.* The progress of the cause was low and additions few; but, in 1804, there appeared symptoms of a revival; fifteen persons being added that year by baptism. In 1806, being deprived, by an affecting dispensation of providence, of their venerable deacon, Mr. Stephen Small,† they called two brethren to that important office. Though many were added to their fellowship, yet the frequent ravages of death, for several years, kept down their numbers: no fewer than fifteen valuable members of

* Supra p. 284.

† This pious and useful christian was about seventy-five years of age; and had been an honourable member of this church for upwards of fifty years. He was liberal to the poor, and generous in the support of religion: often repeating his favourite maxim, “God loves a cheerful giver.” He set out to go to a prayer-meeting, on the evening of Jan. 19th. 1806, and was found, some time afterwards, dead in the river. It appeared probable, that, through an awful mistake, he had walked into the water, at the quay, when he intended to go over the bridge. A few days after his funeral, Mr. W. Taylor, his pastor, improved the affecting event, from the appropriate exhortation of our blessed Saviour, “Be ye also ready.” *G. B. R. Vol. II. p. 88.*

this comparatively small society being removed to the church above, in the short space of two years previous to 1812. This prevented their increase and weakened their hands: and, in the following years, they complain of lowness, inactivity and trials. In 1817, they had ninety-three members.—In 1809, Mr. W. Bampton was called by this church to the work of the ministry.

Mr. Trolley continued to preach at *Maltby*,* for a short time after the commencement of the present period, and then removed to Alford. After his departure, Messrs. J. Jarrom, W. Smedley, and N. Hurst, who were successively stationed at Louth, laboured occasionally for this people. Mr. Cameron settling at Louth, in 1803, agreed to preach at Maltby once a fortnight, on the Lord's-day afternoon; and continued this mode of supply, till 1811. His labours here attracted many hearers, and the meeting-house was generally crowded; but few came forwards to declare themselves on the Lord's side. His successor, Mr. J. Stevenson, adopted the same plan of supplying Maltby; but, finding the congregation to decrease, in 1814, he discontinued his visits. In subsequent years, being almost deprived of the public means of grace, the decline of the interest was rapid. In 1816, this society had sunk to seven or eight aged members: and the meeting-house was occupied, one part of the Lord's-day, by a follower of the late Mr. Johnstone, of Liverpool.

The first year of the nineteenth century was marked, at *Fleet*,† by the baptism of three

* Supra, p. 285.

† Supra p. 291

persons, a brother and two sisters, from Gedney-Hill, a village about eleven miles north of Fleet; which laid the foundation of an important accession to the cause at that place. In 1803, Mr. Pocklington, one of their members was called forth to preach the gospel, and was usefully employed in the adjacent villages. For several subsequent years, a diversity of sentiment on some important doctrinal points, occasioned much uneasiness and altercation; and issued in the loss of several who had been useful and respectable members of this society. This gave a check to the progress of religion, but the steadiness, zeal, and affection of Mr. Burgess, the pastor, in a good measure, prevented the mischief that otherwise might have been produced. The cause continued to gain ground; and, about this time, attempts were made, by this church in conjunction with Spalding, to introduce the general baptists into Holbeach, a market town a few miles distance. The meeting-house which the methodists had occupied was hired, and preaching commenced; but these attempts proved unsuccessful. July 26th, a house was registered at Sutton St. James, six miles south of Fleet, when Mr. Burgess preached the first discourse there, from Acts vii. 42.—In the following year, the practice of singing was adopted into the public worship of this society. In June 1808, Mr. H. Everard was called to the ministry by his brethren at Fleet; as was Mr. W. Smith, in 1810.

The members of this church residing at Gedney Hill had now increased to fifteen. Preaching had been established in this village for several years, and the labours of Mr. Everard, their principal supply, were approved and blest. The spirit for hearing which had been excited, ren-

dered the congregations too large for the dwelling-house in which they had hitherto assembled; and it was determined to build a meeting-house. One of their friends generously made them a present of a piece of ground, and a neighbouring gentleman kindly advanced pecuniary aid. The design was at length accomplished, at an expence of nearly two hundred pounds. This commodious place of worship was opened, April 12th. 1811, by Mr. Burgess, of Fleet, and Mr. Jarrom, of Wisbeach: who preached, the former from 1 Cor i. 23, 24; the latter, from Luke xv. 7.

In 1812, this society renewed its application for admission into the New Connection: and, as the causes of the former objection were removed, it was, at the subsequent association, unanimously received. It then consisted of one hundred and seven members, and the cause was prosperous. Preaching was maintained, every Lord's-day, morning and evening, at Fleet; and in the afternoon at Lutton.

But the health of Mr. Burgess began now to decline, and he was not able to exert himself in the work of the ministry as he had formerly done. An asthmatic complaint, which gained strength daily, obliged him to forbear preaching in winter on the Lord's-day evenings. He was seized with a violent attack of this disorder, on the night of Nov. 30th. 1813; but recovered so far as to be able to preach a funeral sermon, on Dec. 2nd. and afterwards to attend a church-meeting. The exertion and the coldness of the weather greatly increased his complaint; and Dec. 11th. 1813, he was released from mortality and all its pains. His remains were interred in the meeting-house, as a mark of the affection and respect of his mourning people; and the day following his

death was observed by the church as a season of fasting and prayer. Mr. Binns, of Bourn, preached his funeral sermon, Dec. 16th. to a crowded and weeping auditory, from Psa. lxxiii. 26: a text which had been chosen by Mr. Burgess a short time before his dissolution.

In a few weeks after the decease of their lamented pastor, the friends at Fleet turned their attention to Mr. Rogers, of Beeston, who paid them a visit, Feb. 1814. His labours and character were so satisfactory, that he was unanimously invited to accept the pastoral office. He complied; and settled at Fleet in the following August. He commenced his labours with zeal and affection; and the blessing of the Lord rendered them very successful. In 1817, the number of members had risen to one hundred and thirty; and the cause of religion was advancing both at Fleet and Gedney. Six preaching stations were then occupied by this society; and at each of them the congregations were numerous.

Through the whole of this period the state of religion at *Killingholm** wore a discouraging aspect. The congregations were indeed as numerous as could be expected; but conversions were few. For some time Mr. Atterby preached for the friends here; but they depended, during the greatest part of this interval, on the labours of Mr. E. Hunter. His temporal circumstances were low, and he was much afflicted with a rheumatic lameness: he could not, therefore, exert himself with that perseverance and vigour which the drooping cause required. And though, towards the middle of this period, one or two

* Supra, p. 271.

young men joined this society, and afforded him valuable assistance, yet little progress was made. In 1816, the members were thirty, who lamented the low state of religion amongst them.

The church at *Gosberton** continued destitute of a regular minister, till the spring of 1802; when Mr. John Bissill left Wimeswould, and, settling at Sutterton, a village about four miles east of Gosberton, became its constant preacher. He laboured with diligence, zeal and success; and the cause extended itself into neighbouring places. Mr. Bissill was ordained to the pastoral office over this society, Oct. 24th. 1805. On this occasion, Mr. D. Taylor, of London, addressed the minister, from Prov. xxiii. 15, 16; and Mr. J. Deacon, the church, from 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.

For a short time after this solemnity, the cause of religion prospered abundantly: the congregations increased, and the members who, in 1802, had sunk to twenty-seven, amounted, in 1807, to seventy-two. But, in the close of that year, indisposition obliged Mr. Bissill to suspend his exertions; and this suspension was soon followed by a division in the church: the friends at Sutterton and its vicinity withdrawing, in the following spring, and leaving only thirty-five members at Gosberton. At first, they obtained supplies from neighbouring churches; but, though the congregation continued considerable, yet the cause declined. In 1809, Mr. C. Biggs returned to them, and laboured amongst them till Michaelmas, 1812. On his departure, they depended for preaching chiefly on their own friends, Messrs. Clark and Anderson; who en-

* Supra, p. 300.

deavoured to supply the wants of a more regular ministry. In 1815, Mr. W. Bampton, who had for some time assisted at Sutterton, removed to Gosberton ; and divided his labours between the two congregations. This arrangement appears to have been useful ; as they reported, in 1817, that they were well attended with hearers, and hoped that the prospect was, on the whole, encouraging. Their number then was twenty-two ; of whom five had been baptized the preceding year.

When Mr. Bissill first settled at *Sutterton*, the neighbourhood was almost totally ignorant of dissenters, and paid very little attention to religion. The methodists had, indeed, a few weeks previously, registered a small house in the village, which was occupied by a person whose wife had been connected with the general baptists ; but Mr. Bissill being invited to preach in it, the methodists discontinued their visits. He continued, therefore, to preach there regularly, on the evenings of the Lord's-days ; and the house was soon crowded with hearers. This place being found too small and in other respects inconvenient, several of the friends exerted themselves ; and a new and commodious meeting-house was erected, at an expence of three hundred pounds ; which was opened, by Mr. D. Taylor, of London, Sept. 29th. 1803. After some time, Mr. Bissill, finding himself incapable, through weakness of body, of preaching twice every Lord's-day at Gosberton, and once at Sutterton, relinquished the morning service at the former place ; and, when his strength was in some measure recovered, commenced service in the morning and evening at Sutterton ; visiting

Gosberton in the afternoon. At first, the congregations in the mornings were small ; but they gradually increased, till they became too large for the meeting-house.

The pleasing effects were not confined to this village. The family of a gentleman at Fosdike, a place a few miles to the eastward of Sutterton, having attended with profit on Mr. Bissill's ministry, he licensed one of his own houses, in the summer of 1805, and invited that minister to declare the way of salvation to his neighbours. This invitation was gladly accepted ; and preaching was maintained there regularly every Friday evening, for several years. In the summer following, another generous friend, at his own expence, hired a room at Kirton, near Boston, in which Mr. Bissill conducted a weekly service on Thursday evening. The attendance at Kirton was encouraging, though little permanent good was effected ; but, at Fosdike, the hearers were numerous, and several were brought to profess faith in Christ.

But these vigorous exertions to spread the gospel, undermined the health of the pastor ; and brought on a complication of disorders which compelled him to retire, though very reluctantly, from the active duties of the ministry. On this occasion, a misunderstanding arose among the members of this flourishing church, which issued in a division. In the spring of 1808, the friends who resided at Sutterton and its vicinity, who had been hitherto reckoned members of the church at Gosberton, formed themselves into a distinct society, consisting of thirty-one members ; and invited Mr. Bissill to take the oversight of them.

This minister's indisposition continuing, the congregation was supplied with preaching by the friendship of the neighbouring ministers, till Midsummer, 1809; when Mr. James Smith, who then laboured at Kirton in Lindsay, was invited to settle with them, as an assistant to the pastor. He accepted the invitation, and removed to Sutterton in the following August. The hearers had begun to decline previous to Mr. Smith's arrival, and this declension became afterwards still more visible. Discontent arose, which led to alterations; and parties were formed. The peace of the church was destroyed, and the progress of religion retarded. The congregations at Sutterton were still more diminished by these intestine contentions; and the houses at Fosdike and Kirton, in which preaching had been maintained, with such a prospect of success, were thereby shut against the ministers. At length Mr. Smith left the neighbourhood, and harmony was restored; but the interest of the Redeemer had received a check, which it could not speedily recover.

In 1811, Mr. W. Bampton, who had been called to the ministry by the church at Boston, was invited to settle at Sutterton; and Mr. Bissill had then so far recovered his health as to be able, in some measure, to resume his pastoral duties. The cause gradually recovered strength, and the congregations improved at Sutterton; but the ground gained at the outposts was irretrievably lost. Attempts were made, in 1811, to introduce the gospel into Swineshead, a village about six miles north-west of Sutterton; and a house was licensed for that purpose. But, when the time arrived, the occupier refusing his consent, Mr. Bissill preached in the street; and continued

that practice through the summer. Towards winter, a place was fitted up for public worship, which would accommodate two hundred persons; and preaching was supported in this place, with various interruptions, for several years. Some success attended the attempt, but its distance and the want of ministers retarded the progress of the cause; and induced them, in 1817, to discontinue their visits. In 1812, some unsuccessful efforts were also made to establish a station for preaching at Algarkirk. In 1814, death deprived this society of several valuable members, which, in connection with the discouraging aspect of the times, and the precarious state of the pastor's health, cast a still deeper gloom over the prospect. In 1817, the number of members was twenty-six, and they complained that the word was attended with little success.

The church which Mr. John Smith had gathered at *Tydd St. Giles'** gradually improved under his care, till Jan. 24th. 1807; when, after a fortnight's indisposition, he was removed by death, in the sixty second year of his age. His remains were interred in the meeting-house which his friends owed to his liberality; and Mr. Burgess, of Fleet, preached his funeral sermon, from Psal. xii. 1. After his decease, Mr. Pocklington, an occasional preacher at Fleet, was invited to assist this people, and laboured for them several years. Though the congregations were considerable and harmony prevailed in their councils, yet additions were few. In 1810, preaching was commenced at Tydd-Gote, a neighbouring village, and the hearers were numerous. Desirous of

* Supra p. 301.

obtaining a settled pastor, these friends invited Mr. James Smith, who had lately left Suterton, to settle with them. His labours were highly approved and greatly blest. The cause revived, and seventeen persons were baptized in the following year. Mr. Smith was, therefore, ordained, June 3rd. 1813 : when Mr. Burgess gave the charge, and Mr. Jarrom addressed the church.

About this time, a few friends at Sutton St. James, a place in the vicinity, to which Messrs. Burgess and Everard had extended their labours with encouraging success, withdrew from the church at Fleet, and joined the church at Tydd St. Giles'. Mr. Smith, therefore, preached at Sutton ; and the hearers increasing, it was thought necessary, in 1814, to provide more suitable accommodations. A neat meeting-house was accordingly erected ; which was soon filled with attentive hearers. In 1817, the congregations were numerous, at all the three places, where they maintained regular preaching ; and the members, which in 1811, were only twenty-three, had then risen to sixty-five.

The church at *Wisbeach** early in the nineteenth century, invited Mr. Joseph Jarrom, who had been some time at the Academy, and was then supplying at Louth, to settle with them. He complied ; and removed to that town, Jan. 1802. Soon after his arrival, the hearers increased, and pleasing symptoms of revival appeared. The meeting-house, which was old, decayed and very inconveniently situated, having become too small for the congregation, it was determined to erect a larger one in a more eligible

* Supra p. 308.

part of the town. This new building was opened, Oct. 27th. 1803, by Mr. D. Taylor, who preached in the morning and afternoon; and Mr. W. Burgess, who delivered a discourse in the evening. The prospect still continuing to brighten, Mr. Jarrom was requested to take the oversight of this church; and was ordained to the pastoral office, May 22nd. 1804; when Mr. D. Taylor addressed the minister, from 2 Tim. ii. 15, and Mr. Pollard, of Quorndon, the people, from 1 Thess. v. 12.

From this period, the society of general baptists at Wisbeach gradually increased in number and respectability. The hearers were numerous; additions frequent; and their minister highly approved and respected. In 1812, it was found necessary, for the accommodation of the auditors, to erect two side galleries in the meeting-house. And though, in subsequent years, death made affecting inroads on their numbers, yet, in 1817, the members amounted to one hundred and four, who gave this encouraging account of the state of religion amongst them: "The peace of our church, the prosperity of vital godliness in the members, the number and seriousness of the hearers, and the attention paid to church meetings and prayer meetings, are not less than in former years;" when they had represented the interest as flourishing.

For a few years after the commencement of the nineteenth century, the church at *St. Ives'** exhibited some symptoms of prosperity. Regular preaching was supported at Fenstanton and Warboys; and the congregations at both of those

* Supra p. 315.

places, as well as at St. Ives', were numerous. Thinking that a more commodious place of worship might tend to the advancement of the cause, they determined, in 1806, to sell the old meeting house, and purchased a building in a more eligible situation, which they fitted up, for their religious assemblies: the whole expence amounting to six hundred pounds.

A slight revival followed; but, it was partial and transient. During the last eight years of the period under review, no additions were made to the society, and the members gradually decreased. Mr. Birley's strength and health failed; and, for the greater part of that interval, he was wholly laid aside from preaching. Supplies were obtained from various parts of the Connection; but no permanent good was effected. In 1817, they stated, that religion continued to droop; and their congregations were small. The number of members then was twenty-seven.

Through the whole of the first seventeen years of the nineteenth century, the church at *Kirton in Lindsay** was destitute of a pastor. Mr. J. Smith, of Thorne, removing to this place, in 1805, his labours were blest, and several additions were made to their number. But, in 1809, he accepted an invitation at Sutterton, and they were again left without a regular ministry. The preachers from the Yorkshire churches frequently visited them, during subsequent years, and their efforts retarded the decline of the cause. It continued, notwithstanding, to droop; and its most sanguine friends felt apprehensions for the issue. In 1815, an exertion was made, with a hope of raising the

* Supra p. 318.

interest; and, as the meeting was in an inconvenient situation, very damp, and hastening to decay, a new one was erected in an eligible part of the town. But the want of proper ministerial supplies prevented the good effects of this measure; and, in 1817, the members had sunk to thirty-one, who gave this affecting account of their state: "Our situation is truly distressing. The cause is rapidly declining; and should not Providence interpose, we are in danger of being overwhelmed. At present, the friends at Epworth kindly assist us once a fortnight."

Louth is a respectable corporate town in Lincolnshire, twenty-eight miles north-east of Lincoln. At this place, there was formerly a general baptist church, of which we have not been able to obtain any particulars. It had totally disappeared in 1800, and the meeting-house was offered for sale. There were no dissenters in the town besides the methodists, and religion was in a low state. These circumstances being laid before the Association, held at Spalding, in 1800, it was resolved to purchase the meeting-house and endeavour to raise a church. Mr. D. Taylor, at the request of this assembly, went to Louth; and purchased the building for two hundred pounds. For a short time, the place was shut up; but public worship was soon commenced, and supported by the occasional visits of Messrs. R. Smith, W. Taylor, and other ministers. Mr. Jarrom went from the academy to Louth, in the beginning of 1801; and laboured there regularly till the following Christmas. His preaching attracted the attention of the neighbours, and was blest to the conversion of several; but, being under a prior engagement with the friends at

Wisbeach, he removed at the close of the year. Mr. W. Smedley, another student, succeeded him ; and carried the good work forwards with diligence and success. The subject was again submitted to the consideration of the Association, in 1802, when it was agreed, that it would be for the interest of religion to form a regular society at Louth : and Messrs R. Smith and W. Taylor were requested to take a journey thither to carry this resolution into effect. They accordingly went, Sept. 12th. 1802 ; and five candidates were baptized, with whom twelve others, who had formerly been members of baptist churches, united themselves. These seventeen persons were formed into a society, to whom Mr. Smith delivered a discourse on the order of a christian church, and administered the Lord's supper.

Mr. Smedley, after spending upwards of a year at Louth, returned to the Academy to finish his studies. His place was occupied by Mr. N. Hurst, whose efforts were productive of much good, and many were added to the church. He was obliged to leave them at the expiration of four months ; though he afterwards made them another visit. Mr. F. Cameron, who had then completed his preparatory studies under Mr. D. Taylor, was stationed at Louth, after Mr. Hurst's departure. His labours and character were highly approved ; and the interest daily acquired strength and respectability. No fewer than eighteen persons were added by baptism, in 1805 ; and the members then amounted to fifty-nine. They therefore invited Mr. Cameron to become their pastor ; and he was ordained to the sacred office, July 4th. 1805. On this occasion, Mr. D. Taylor delivered a charge to the minister, from

Col. iv. 17 ; and Mr. W. Burgess preached to the people, from Deut. iii. 28.

After the ordination of Mr. Cameron, the cause of religion prospered for several years. The pastor and his flock strove together to promote it; and the great Head of the church crowned their united exertions with his blessing. In 1807, the increase of the hearers made it necessary to erect a gallery. But, in 1810, Mr. Cameron resigned his office, and discontinued his stated labours among this people. This cast a temporary gloom over the prospect. The church, soon afterwards, invited Mr. Joseph Stevenson, the pastor of the society at Coningsby, to their assistance ; and he removed to Louth, in Nov. 1810. For several years, his services were acceptable, and harmony prevailed. Additions were not unfrequent ; but various subjects of discontent occurring from time to time, several withdrew, and the number of members remained stationary. In 1813, there were seventy-eight in fellowship, and preaching was regularly supported at five adjacent stations, besides Louth. But unhappy events tended to foster the seeds of discontent ; and animosities were carried so far, that nearly thirty of the members withdrew from the society ; and the cause seemed hastening to ruin. At length, in 1815, Mr. Stevenson's connection with this church ceased ; and Mr. Jones, who had been pursuing his studies at Wisbeach, was invited to preach. His services were well approved, and the breaches, which former discord had made, were gradually repaired. Many of those who had withdrawn were restored to their stations ; and, in less than two years, twenty were added by baptism. In 1817, the members had increased to eighty, "who were peaceable and

united : and the number and seriousness of those who attended the ministry of the word, encouraged them to hope, that the work of the Lord was advancing."

We have already hinted, that the general baptist cause at *Spalding* had, at the formation of the New Connection, sunk very low.* We have not been able to collect any further particulars respecting it, till 1786, when Mr. Rusling settled at that place.† It is probable, that only six or seven nominal members of that once flourishing society then remained. But such was the effect produced by his vehement zeal, that, in the two months previous to his ordination, seventeen candidates were baptized. This encouraging success made his friends impatient for a closer union ; and, in Oct. 1787, he was ordained to the pastoral office over them, by Mr. G. Boyce, the messenger. In the following year, he attended the Lincolnshire Association, and proposed to unite his church with that body. It was received with pleasure by that declining assembly, and esteemed a valuable acquisition ; but the union lasted only a few years. For a season, the cause advanced rapidly ; and, in less than four years, fifty-one members were added to the church by baptism and recommendations. In the latter years of his eldership, there was, however, an affecting reverse. Being of a violent disposition, and supposing his labours slighted, his public discourses became pointed, and his language censorious. This imprudent conduct naturally increased the dissatisfaction of his auditors, and inflamed their resentment. An open rupture

* Supra, pp. 120, 121.

† Supra p. 297.

was the disgraceful result; and, in 1797, he was excluded from the society.

Being thus left destitute, the Spalding friends turned their eyes to Mr. John Bartol, a worthy member of the church at Gosberton, who, though advancing in years, had been only recently called to the work of the ministry: and he visited them, for a short time, as a supply. They soon afterwards, probably at his suggestion, applied for admission into the New Connection, to the Association at Halifax, in 1798; and requested advice respecting the removal of Mr. Bartol, to Spalding. That assembly discouraged the design, and advised them to look for a younger preacher. Mr. Bartol and his friends, however, ventured to act on their own judgment. He was ordained to the pastoral office, Nov. 22nd. 1798: when Mr. Burgess gave the charge, from 1 Cor. i. 7; and Mr. Binns addressed the church, from 1 Thess. v. 13. At the same time, Messrs. Lawson and Neale were ordained deacons; to whom Mr. Briggs gave an admonition, from 1 Tim. iii. 13. At the next Association, this church was admitted into the New Connection, and the number of members then was twenty-two.

The congregations increasing and the prospect brightening, it was thought proper to give their old place of worship, which had stood more than eighty years, a thorough repair. This was completed previous to the Association, in 1800, and the alterations gave great satisfaction. Mr. Bartol's labours being well approved, the congregations continued to increase, and the cause daily gained strength. The members had risen to forty-two, when an unexpected event cast a sudden gloom over every mind. On the morning of July 18th. 1810, their pastor, who had then

attained his seventieth year, being employed in pruning a fruit tree which was trained to the walls of his house, by some accident, fell from the ladder, struck his head against the ground, dislocated his neck, and instantly expired. This affecting dispensation was improved by Mr. Burgess, at Gosberton, where Mr. Bartol was interred, from 2 Cor. v. 8; and at Spalding, from Psal. xii. 1.

But the cloud, which the loss of this venerable pastor had spread over the interest in this neighbourhood, was quickly dispersed. Mr. H. Everard, an occasional minister, at Fleet, was invited to assist the friends at Spalding; and his visits were so well approved, that, at their earnest request, he became their regular preacher. His stated labours soon drew such crowds of hearers that the place of worship was too small to accommodate them; and, it was judged expedient to pull it down, and erect one on a larger scale. This was accordingly done; and the new, commodious and spacious meeting-house was opened, Nov. 7th. 1811, with three appropriate discourses, by Messrs. Bissill, of Sutterton, W. Taylor, of Boston, and W. Burgess, of Fleet. Increasing success crowned their subsequent exertions; and the friends were unanimous and earnest in requesting Mr. Everard to accept the office of pastor among them. He was, therefore, ordained, May 21st. 1812. Mr. Burgess delivered the charge, from 1 Pet. v. 2—4; and Mr. W. Taylor preached to the people, from 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. On the same day, Mr. Butters was ordained to the deacon's office, and Mr. Binus addressed him, from Acts vi. 2. "Serve Tables."

In the following years, Mr. Everard's health was so seriously affected, that he was, for a con-

siderable time, laid aside from the active duties of his station. The disorderly conduct of some of the members likewise greatly retarded the prosperity of the cause. But, in the midst of these discouragements, religion advanced. The congregations were large and attentive; and, in 1817, the number in fellowship had increased to sixty-two.

We have already seen that the general baptists at *Bourn*, formed one society with the friends at *Spalding* and *Fleet*, till towards the close of the seventeenth century, when they became a distinct church under the pastoral care of Mr. J. Hooke.* The cause seems to have prospered in his hands, and to have extended itself to various adjacent places. In 1717, a few friends united and purchased certain premises; on which they erected a commodious meeting-house; and conveyed it to the "baptized believers at *Bourn* for ever." The principal persons concerned in this good work were, Mr. R. Ives, sen. R. Ives, jun. J. Arnold, W. Hussey, and J. Richardson; and the cost appears to have been nearly one hundred pounds. A short time after this erection, in June 1720, this church contained sixty-three members: of whom thirty resided at *Bourn*, and the rest were scattered over many adjacent villages.

As the duties of the messenger's office, frequently called Mr. Hooke to distant places, his friends were obliged to seek for a supply of preaching during his absence. Mr. J. Halford, the pastor of the church at *Coningsby*, having settled at *Bourn*, an arrangement was made between the two societies, in 1725, for him to

* Vol. I. 216, 318.

administer the ordinances at Bourn. The death of Mr. Hooke, in 1736,* left Mr. Halford sole minister; and he appears to have discharged the pastoral duties amongst them till July 4th. 1759; when he was removed by death.† Some time after this event, Mr. Young from Yarmouth settled here, and was ordained, Aug. 30th. 1761, by Mr. Boyce. He sustained the pastoral office for thirty years; but the interest declined under his care. At the period of his decease, Sept. 27th. 1791, only four or five nominal members remained; and the form as well as the power of religion had nearly disappeared. For a few years, the preachers from Spalding paid occasional visits to Bourn: and, in 1794, Mr. Porter settled with them; but the irregularity of his conduct compelled him, in a few months, to quit the town.

In these destitute circumstances, the few persons who still adhered to the cause applied for assistance to the ministers of the New Connection, in Lincolnshire; who held their quarterly conference, at Bourn, Sept. 24th. 1794. At this meeting, various preachers were mentioned, as likely to suit them; and, after some ineffectual overtures to others, they finally turned their attention to Mr. Binns of Gosberton, to whom they gave an earnest and unanimous invitation to settle amongst them. He laid the case before the Lincolnshire Conference, April 7th. 1795; and that assembly, after a serious and circum-

* Supra p. 108.

† In a note to page 120 in this volume, it is stated, that Mr. Halford's death was occasioned by a mistake of his apothecary. This we have since learnt, is not correct. The person to whom that accident occurred was Mr. Ives, a member of this church, who was occasionally employed in the work of the ministry.

stantial investigation, gave an opinion in favour of his compliance. He accordingly removed to Bourn ; where his services were highly blest. He was therefore requested to assume the pastoral office ; and ordained, April 19th. 1796 : when Mr. Burgess gave the charge to the minister, from 1 Tim. iv. 16 ; and addressed the people, from Heb. xiii. 7.

After this solemnity, Mr. Binns prosecuted his sacred work with increased vigour. He extended his labours to neighbouring villages; and at Morton the hearers were so numerous, that the usual place of preaching could not hold one fourth part of them. He therefore preached in the open air, throughout the summer of 1798. In the following year, the improvement of their prospects encouraged them to repair and enlarge the meeting-house at Bourn. In this year, they made application for admission into the New Connection ; and, in 1799, were received. The number of members then was thirteen ; religion they hoped was reviving ; and regular preaching was maintained at Bourn, Morton, and Castle-Bytham.

But, in the decay of the cause, discipline had been much neglected. One principal object, therefore, of the pastor's solicitude, was to re-establish order in this reviving society. His efforts for this purpose were much assisted by the co-operation of Mrs. Gibson, a worthy member of this church. Being a person of large property and good natural abilities, she was highly respected and had great influence in the town as well as amongst the members. Convinced of the propriety and importance of the reforms proposed by the minister, she exerted all her interest to carry them into effect. She continued

to be an effectual “fellow labourer” in the work of the Lord, till June 7th. 1800; when she died, full of hope and joy in the Saviour.

The cause at Bourn gradually improved; and the members and congregation increased: but various causes contributed to render the progress slow and uncertain. In 1806, they were obliged to discontinue their visits to Castle-Bytham; but, about the same time, they opened two other places. The succeeding year however produced more pleasing events: fourteen being added to the church by baptism, and the increase of hearers rendering it necessary to enlarge the meeting-house. From this time, the revival was more rapid: and, though the disorderly conduct of some who had professed to devote themselves to the Lord, the death of several valuable members, and the removal of others to distant abodes, tended to lessen their prosperity; yet, in 1817, the members amounted to fifty-four, and the congregations were generally numerous.

It appears from the former part of this work, that the general baptists had formed a society at *Peterborough*, in Northamptonshire, during the protectorate of Cromwell;* but of its future proceedings we have not been able to obtain any regular account. In 1718, Mrs. Dorothy Ewen, of Peterborough, probably a member of this church, bequeathed certain houses and lands to trustees, the rents and profits of which were to be applied towards the support of a minister “to preach the gospel to the general baptists at Peterborough.” Towards the close of the same century, Mr. Moyses was their pastor for a num-

* Vol. I. pp. 136, 137, 160.

ber of years ; but, in the latter part of the time, seldom preached, because he could not collect a congregation. Mr. Poole, of Wisbeach, also, for some time, received the emoluments of the office: though, for similar reasons, he very seldom was called to discharge its duties. In 1794, the cause had sunk so low, that only two members remained, and the property was in danger of being lost. In these circumstances, Mr. Peel attended the Lincolnshire Conference, at Boston, June 20th. 1794, and laid the particulars before that meeting. Such advice was then given as was thought most likely to secure the property and revive the expiring interest. After some further arrangements, the ministers who composed this conference agreed to supply Peterborough with preaching once a fortnight on the Lord's day, and as often on the week-day evening. The remaining members of the ancient society were, at the same time, joined by several other inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who stood in fellowship with distant churches.

This mode of supply was continued till May, 1797, when Mr. S. Wright, who had been an occasional preacher at Spalding, removed to them, and became their regular minister. His labours were made useful; and, though he encountered some opposition, yet the cause gained strength. In less than two years, the old meeting-house, which was gone to decay, was taken down and a new one erected; and some advantageous alterations were made in the endowment.

In 1798, this society applied for admission into the New Connection; but its name does not appear on the List of Churches till 1801; when it consisted of eighteen members, and its seasons

of worship were well attended. An unhappy dispute in 1804, retarded the progress of religion. The breach however, was soon healed ; and, for many succeeding years, a regular improvement was visible: the congregations were encouraging; the members gradually increased, and some attempts were made to carry the gospel into neighbouring villages. In 1817, the persons in fellowship amounted to thirty-four; and the prospect was then cheering.

In the beginning of the seventeenth century, a general baptist church existed at *March*, a market town in the Isle-of-Ely, about twenty-six miles north-west of Cambridge: the origin of which we have not been able to trace. It was then under the pastoral care of Mr. Thomas Mears, who died, in 1735, aged sixty-six years. After him Mr. Jeremiah Buckland presided over this society till 1744, when he also was removed by death. In a few months after his disease, Mr. T. Mills removed from *Spratton* in Northamptonshire; and, settling at *March*, was invited soon afterwards to take the oversight of this people. He sustained the pastoral office for more than fifty years; but, towards the close of his ministry, as he advanced in years, a degree of dissatisfaction arose and the cause declined.

In order to revive the drooping interest, it was agreed to invite the neighbouring ministers to preach for them occasionally: and about 1790, Messrs. Birley of *St. Ives*, Freeston of *Wisbeach*, and Scott of *Chatteris*, paid them frequent visits. In 1792, Mr. T. Ewen, who had been called to the ministry by the church at *Fleet*, removed his habitation to *Walsoken*, and became a member of the society at *Wisbeach*. Besides regularly

assisting Mr. Freeston, he occasionally supplied destitute churches. Among other places, he was invited to March; and delivered his first discourse there, Dec. 9th. 1792. During the nine succeeding months, he visited them only a few times; but his services were so well approved, that, in Oct. 1793, the pastor and people united in requesting him to preach for them once a month. In the following May, he consented to visit them once a fortnight, and continued thus to supply them, to their great satisfaction, till the end of the following year.

January 1796, Mr. Mills, being then in his eightieth year, was induced, at the request of the church, to resign the pastoral and ministerial offices; and Mr. Ewen was invited to preach for them stately; except once a month when Mr. Freeston visited them and administered the Lord's-supper. It was soon evident that Mr. Ewen's more constant labours were made useful; the congregations increasing, and in the course of the first year, thirteen persons being added by baptism. This pleasing success induced him, May 18th. 1797, at the earnest intreaty of the people, to remove his residence to the scene of his exertions.

His first care was to restore regular discipline, which had been too much neglected, and stated church meetings were appointed. He also extended the sphere of his labours; and, in the following year, commenced preaching at Doddington, a village some miles south of March. The congregation had increased so much in 1799, that it was determined to erect a new meeting-house at March. Many of the wealthy friends of religion, both members and others, entered heartily into the design; and upwards of three

hundred pounds were immediately subscribed towards carrying it into effect. It was therefore prosecuted with vigour; and compleated, at an expence of more than six hundred pounds. Mr. D. Taylor, of London, preached the first discourse in this new building, Oct. 1799, from Exod. xx. 24. About the same time, this society applied for admission into the New Connection; and, in 1800, was admitted. Preaching, which was then maintained at March, Doddington, and Wimblington, was generally well attended; and the members were forty-four.

For several succeeding years, notwithstanding this encouraging success, Mr. Ewen declined accepting the pastoral office, and the church depended on the occasional presence of an ordained minister for the administration of the Lord's-supper. But, the cause continuing to prosper and the affection of his friends to increase, he at length yielded to their wishes; and was ordained, Aug. 1805. On this occasion, Mr. Burgess, of Fleet, delivered the introductory discourse; Mr. Pollard, of Quorndon, gave the charge to the minister, from 2 Tim. ii. 15; and Mr. Freeston, of Hinckley, addressed the people, from Phil. i. 2.

Being now fully organized and enjoying the regular participation of all the privileges of church-membership, they proceeded with increased vigour and alacrity: and though they had to encounter the usual difficulties and experienced their portion of those trials which are common in this imperfect state, the interest still gained ground. In 1813, they enlarged the galleries of the meeting-house which was filled with attentive hearers. In 1817, the number of members had risen to ninety-one, and the congregations continued to increase.

A place of worship was erected at *Forncett St. Peter's*, Norfolk, about the middle of the eighteenth century, and was occupied by various parties in succession. Soon after the close of that century, Mr. J. Hall, who had been a member of the church at Fleet, settling at Barham, opened a school and commenced preaching in it. Learning that the person who then preached at Forncett, which was only six miles distant, had been baptized by immersion, and approached, in many things, to the sentiments of the general baptists, he paid him a visit; and proposed an occasional exchange of labours. This was readily agreed to; but soon afterwards a difference arose between the preacher at Forncett and his people, which ended in a separation. On this rupture, Mr. Hall was invited to remove to this place and become their minister. For some time, he declined leaving Barham; but, at length, he yielded to their wishes and removed to Forncett, in Nov. 1813.

Here he commenced his labours with zeal and diligence; and, being assisted and encouraged by the occasional visits of the ministers from the Lincolnshire churches, his labours were crowned with success. In June, 1814, three persons were baptized by Mr. Binns of Bourn; and, being joined by five others who had been formerly members of baptist societies, a church was formed, consisting of eight persons; which, the same year, was placed on the List of Churches composing the New Connection.

In the following three years, the progress of the cause was rapid. Many were baptized; and Dec. 25th. 1816, Mr. Hall was ordained over this rising society; when Mr. Jarrom addressed the minister, from 1 Tim. iv. 16; and Mr. Binns the

people, from 1 Thess. v. 13. On the following evening, two of the brethren were set apart to the office of deacons; to whom Mr. Binns delivered a charge, from 1 Tim. iii. 10. Great exertions were made to extend the news of salvation into the dark places of the vicinity; and, before June, 1817, regular preaching was established at eight of the adjacent villages. The members had then risen to sixty-nine, who were peaceable, united and zealous; and the congregations were increasing in numbers and respectability.

The Isle of Axholme, situated in the north-east corner of Lincolnshire, was early a noted station of the general baptists, who probably gathered a society there during the time of the civil wars, or under the protectorate of Cromwell. It appears, from the tattered remains of their Records, that, in 1673, this church consisted of nearly one hundred members, scattered in various towns and villages; but chiefly residing at *Epworth* and *Butterwick*, which afterwards gave their united names to the church. Messrs. John Norfolk and John Shaw were joint elders of this society. The former of these ministers died, in May, 1678; but the latter continued in his station for more than thirty years; as his signature is affixed to the minutes of a meeting for discipline in 1705. During his ministry, the cause seems to have prospered; for we are informed by an author who wrote against the baptists, in 1700, that the river Torn, in the Isle of Axholme, was then famous for dipping;* and, in 1699, a piece of land was given to this society for a burying-ground, by John Ile, one of its

* Hooke's Necessary Apology, page 111.

members, which was fenced in by a voluntary subscription.

We can learn no more particulars of the proceedings of this society, till 1738, when it is probable, that affairs had gone to confusion through the neglect of a proper attention to order. At a meeting for discipline, on March 13th. of that year, at which Mr. Johnson the messenger presided, it was agreed to hold regular church-meetings every four months, and to chose Israel Cotton for their pastor, and Cornelius Chamberlain and William Keighley for deacons. Messrs. Cotton and Chamberlain were ordained to their respective offices, April 13th. 1739, by Mr. Johnson ; but we hear no more of Mr. Keighley. Mr. Cotton was a native of the Peak, Derbyshire ; a pious christian and diligent pastor. The cause of the Redeemer flourished under his care ; and several young men were then called forth, by this church, to preach the gospel, who afterwards became useful ministers. Amongst these was the late Mr. W. Thompson, of Boston ; whose father was, for many years, an useful and honourable deacon of this society. How long Mr. Cotton was pastor, does not appear : he attended the Lincolnshire Association, in 1758, and probably lived some years beyond that date ; as his successor, Mr. Edward Foster, was not ordained till 1765.

Mr. E. Foster was a member of this society, and had been occasionally employed in the ministry before Mr. Cotton's death ; when he was chosen pastor, and held that office for forty eight years. But his ministrations were not of a character to support the cause : and, though Mr. W. Anderson, who filled the deacon's office, contributed much by his piety and activity to

promote its prosperity, yet it evidently drooped. After the decease of Mr. Anderson, the decline was rapid : the most interesting doctrines of the gospel were seldom introduced in the public discourses, and discipline was almost totally neglected. The natural consequences ensued : the congregations dwindled away, few joined the church, and the ancient members became formal, cold and dead.

This declension continued to increase for several years, and the interest seemed hastening to destruction, when a pleasing and unexpected revival took place. A few young men, who had been roused to an attention to eternal things, by the preaching of the methodists, determined to search the scriptures for themselves, and follow what they taught. They were soon convinced, that believers' baptism was sanctioned by those Oracles of truth ; and, in consequence, offered themselves, in 1812, as candidates for fellowship with the general baptists. They were accepted and baptized ; and, being zealous and hearty in the cause of religion, their example and exertions soon produced the happiest effect. In Aug. 1813, Mr. Foster was removed by death ; and, Mr. D. Cheeseman, who had for some time been engaged as an assistant preacher, was ordained to the pastoral office, in Sept. following. He was assisted in his exertions to bring sinners to the Saviour by these zealous young associates. Their labours were crowned with the divine blessing ; and many soon gave themselves up to the Lord in his own ordinance.

June, 1815, this church was received into the New Connection. It then consisted of thirty-six members, who were comfortable and unanimous ; and their religious services were well

attended. In the following year, fourteen were baptized, and preaching was established at Messingham, a neighbouring village, with encouraging prospects. In 1817, the number of members was fifty : they had one pastor and three assistant preachers ; the hearers were numerous at Butterwick and increasing at Epworth ; and harmony reigned in the society.

It has been already observed, that, in the seventeenth century, a number of respectable general baptist churches existed in Northamptonshire and the adjacent counties.* One was at Haringworth, under Mr. Stephen Curtis, who suffered fines and imprisonments for his adherence to the truth. He was pastor in 1716, when he must have been advanced in years, and probably did not long survive. In 1729, the church consisted of forty-five members. Mr. Matthew Stanger was pastor of this society in 1745 ; when they purchased a meeting-house at Morcot, in Rutlandshire, a few miles west of Haringworth, and removed their public assemblies to that place.†

* Vol. I. pp. 231—236.

† The church at Morcot, during the eldership of Mr. M. Stanger, reckoned amongst its adherents, if not members, the noted William Whiston, M.A. Thirty-five years before that date, he had been called, as a minister of the Church of England, to baptize two adult persons who had not been baptized in their infancy. On this occasion, one of the candidates, struck probably with the propriety of the preparatory examination, asked him : “Would it not be better if baptism were deferred till after instruction, than used before it ?” To this Mr Whiston had replied : “I honestly confess, that I should myself have thought so : but, I am no legislator ; and submit to what I take to be a law of Christ.” When the business was over, and he reflected on what had passed, he felt dissatisfied, that he had been forced to allow that this law of Christ was not so right as it might have been. He therefore determined to examine the

In 1747, the small general baptist church at Oakham, in the same county, which was then reduced to nine members, united themselves to the church at Morcot. Mr. William Stanger was pastor of this people in 1770; and a considerable revival took place. He was noted for his skill and success as a medical practitioner; and his death, June 23d. 1790, was sincerely lamented, both by his neighbours and his religious connections. For several years, this church depended, for ministerial supplies, on the visits of neigh-

New Testamen', (in which he included the Apostolical Constitutions,) and the most early fathers, in order to ascertain what they meant when they spoke of the baptism of infants. The result was a discovery, that those infants were capable of instruction; and that none were admitted to baptism, during the first two centuries, who had not been previously instructed in the principles of christianity. With his usual frankness, he published this discovery, in 1712, in a piece which he called "Primitive Infant Baptism Revived," and sent it to many of his friends who were dignitaries in the national church. Amongst others he sent it, by an intimate friend, to Sir. Isaac Newton, who returned for answer, that he had already made the same discovery; and, as Mr. Whiston afterwards learnt, was so hearty in his approbation of the baptists, that he believed them to be one of the two witnesses, mentioned Rev. xi.

Though Mr. Whiston so far paid homage to truth as, after this conviction, to refuse to baptize any literal infants, yet he maintained a kind of grumbling union with the establishment, till he reached his eightieth year: when, being disgusted by the introduction of the Athanasian Creed, he forsook her assemblies, and in 1747, attached himself to the general baptists at Morcot; regularly attending at their public worship, and sometimes assisting in conducting it. In order to justify his conduct, he published a "Friendly Address" to his new associates; in which he enumerates their excellencies at full length, and with equal candour, reminds them of several "imperfections" which he had noticed in their system. "A full and particular answer" to this piece was drawn up by Mr. Grantham Killingworth, in a Letter to the author, dated May 11th. 1749, and published, after Mr. Whiston's death, in 1757.

Whiston's Memoirs, page 205, &c.

bouring preachers, or the occasional labours of some of their brethren, who were induced, by the necessity of the case, to endeavour to give a word of exhortation. The cause naturally declined in these circumstances; and they were induced to request Mr. William Curtis, one of their deacons, who had been thus occasionally employed, to accept the pastoral office; to which he was ordained, June 26th. 1797. He continued to preside over them for twenty years; but, being aged, and for a long time infirm, the interest drooped in his hands. In 1816, this declining society was admitted into the New Connection; when the members had sunk to sixteen. In the following year, Mr. Payne, who had left the Academy, was invited to spend a year with them: and, from the spirit for hearing which appeared in the adjacent villages, and the affection which reigned among the members, who then amounted to twenty, the future prospect was encouraging.

In 1816, a small society of general baptists at Misterton were admitted into the New Connection. It was probably an ancient church;* but we have not been able to obtain any account of its rise or progress. In 1817, it was in a low state; consisting of only nine members; several of whom had removed to a distance.

SECT. 4.—*A Sketch of the History of the Churches of the New Connection in the London District, from A.D. 1800 to A.D. 1817.*

THE ancient general baptist society in Church-lane, Whitechapel,† experienced many discour-

* Vol. I. page. 236.

† Supra p. 322.

ments during the first seventeen years of the nineteenth century. In the beginning of that period, the cause appeared to flourish, and the additions were encouraging. But, about 1807, the sparks of discord, which had never been altogether extinguished, blazed forth afresh. Several distressing and irritating circumstances occurred, in quick succession, which had a most unhappy tendency to increase the flame. Dissatisfaction at length rose to such a height, that, in 1811, thirty-one of the members withdrew themselves from fellowship. The remainder endeavoured to support the drooping interest: but, weakened and dispirited by this division, their efforts were languid, and its progress was slow. The advanced age of the minister, also, operated much to prevent a revival. For several years, a considerable degree of unanimity prevailed in the church; but the congregations were small, additions few, and the future prospects discouraging.

Some symptoms of returning prosperity began at length to appear: several of the members seemed more interested in the welfare of Zion; and meetings for prayer and exhortation were better supported. But new troubles soon arose; and contention had risen to an alarming height, when their venerable pastor, Mr. Dan Taylor, was suddenly called to his reward; expiring, without a sigh, in his chair, Nov. 26th. 1816, in the seventy-eighth year of his age. This awful stroke had a happy effect in hushing the tumult of discord, and uniting the sincere friends of the cause. Supplies were obtained from the sister churches in the country, as frequently as possible; and, in 1817, they reported, that, although the state of religion was low amongst

them, yet they hoped that there was a revival. The number of members was then stated at one hundred and thirty-seven.

Many of the friends who seceded from Church-lane, in 1811, formed themselves into a distinct society ; and, for a few months, assembled in *Artillery-street*. Finding that place inconvenient, they soon removed to a school-room in *Charles-street*; where they maintained public worship, and enjoyed the ordinances of the gospel, for a few years. They obtained a supply of ministers, partly from general baptist churches in the country, and partly from other denominations in London. They made several attempts to procure a piece of ground, for a meeting-house, in a proper situation ; but were as often disappointed. The obscurity and inconvenience of the place of worship, and the difficulty of obtaining acceptable ministers, prevented their making any rapid progress : and, at length, they became discouraged. In 1814, they gave up the attempt, and dissolved the union ; when the number of members had increased from twenty-two to thirty-four. A few returned to their old friends, several of the leading persons amongst them afterwards joined the church in Great Suffolk-street, and some united with other denominations ; but it is to be feared that several returned to the world.

The church, which now assembles in *Great Suffolk-street*, had, in 1800, just opened their small meeting-house in *Gravel-lane*.* For several succeeding years, an encouraging revival took place, and the members increased to thirty-seven.

* Supra p. 349.

The obscure situation, and the mean appearance of the little place in which they worshipped, operated much to their disadvantage. Several attempts were made, to procure more convenient accommodations: but the term of the lease ran out, and nothing was effected. The cloud, which overspread the prospect, was increased, by a change in the sentiments of the pastor, Mr. J. B. Shenston; which induced him to resign his charge, at Lady-day, 1809, and join the particular baptists. Soon after this, they were deprived of their place of worship; and this ancient interest appeared again hastening to ruin. Many of the members forsook the cause; and the rest were scattered and discouraged. In this exigency, Mr. D. Taylor and his friends once more stepped forwards, and, collecting the desponding wanderers, encouraged them to make a fresh attempt to maintain the cause. A room was engaged, belonging to one of the members, in which Mr. Taylor, and the students under his care, supplied them with the regular ministration of the word. But, as this was only a temporary accommodation, he persuaded a few friends to join him in procuring a piece of ground and building a convenient meeting-house, in Great Suffolk-street, Southwark. They exerted themselves to obtain subscriptions, and made themselves responsible for the whole expence. The new building was opened, Oct. 9th. 1809, by the Rev. Dr. Collyer of Peckham, and the Rev. J. Hughes of Battersea.

The students continued, for some time, to supply this destitute people; and, among others, Mr. J. Preston frequently visited them. When he had completed the usual term at the Academy, he was invited to preach on probation; and, in due time, was requested to assume the pastoral

office. He was ordained, Feb. 13th. 1811; when Mr. D. Taylor delivered the charge, from Prov. xxiii. 15, 16; and Mr. E. Sexton, of Chesham, addressed the people, from 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

The cause, at first, appeared to gain ground under Mr. Preston's care; no fewer than twelve persons being added to the church by baptism, in the year following. But symptoms of dissatisfaction soon manifested themselves, and retarded the good work. The heavy debt on the meeting-house, was also a continual clog on their exertions, and checked every attempt to revive or extend the interest. These discouragements induced Mr. Preston to accept an invitation from the church at Melbourn, and leave Southwark, at Christmas 1815. On this event, Mr. J. Heard, and several of the principal seceders from Church-lane, united themselves with the society in Great Suffolk-street, and made a vigorous attempt to raise the cause. The meeting-house was repaired and new galleries erected: respectable ministers were procured from their sister churches; and considerable efforts were used to lessen the debt. In 1817, Mr. J. Farrent, who had been the pastor of a general baptist church at Isleham, in Cambridgeshire, was invited to labour amongst them for a year; and, in a few months, was requested to take the oversight of this society. The members were thirty-four, and the congregations more numerous than they had been.

We have seen, in the former volume, that a general baptist church had existed at Portsmouth, probably from the time of Cromwell, and that, in 1700, it was in a flourishing state.*

* Vol. I. pp. 294, 352.

In the succeeding century, like most other societies of the same denomination, it suffered much from the inroads of doctrines very different from those of its founders; and, towards the close of it, had greatly declined. At that period, Mr. John Kingsford was an assistant preacher in this church: and his brother George Kingsford, who for several years had been pastor of the general baptist church at Ramsgate, settling at Portsmouth on account of business, became also a member of the same society. As both these ministers were desirous of being instrumental in spreading the gospel, they began to look round for some proper scene where they might exert themselves in this noble cause; and soon fixed their attention on *Clarence Street*, a populous district without the fortifications of *Portsea*. At that time, there was no place of worship near it, though four were built in a few years afterwards. In conjunction with Mr. Hill, another member of the same church, they opened a subscription towards building a place of worship in this neglected neighbourhood. Their design was liberally encouraged by most of their fellow members: and, a piece of freehold ground being purchased, the building was erected, at an expense of nearly two hundred pounds. It was opened, December 16th. 1798, by Mr. Bogue of Gosport.

Meanwhile, dissatisfaction on account of difference in doctrinal sentiments increased in the church at Portsmouth; and arrangements were, in consequence, made, for the formation of a new interest at Portsea. This was effected, in 1802; a distinct society being formed, consisting of sixteen members. Over this little flock, Mr. J. Kingsford was unanimously chosen pastor; and

ordained, Oct. 31st. 1802, by Mr. D. Taylor, of London, and Mr. J. Kingsford, then pastor of the church at Deal. On the same day, Messrs. James Hill and Joseph Sayer were ordained to the deacons' office.

The blessing of the great Head of the church crowned these attempts with success. The hearers increased and the preaching of the word was rendered effectual to salvation. Many professed their faith in Christ, and gave themselves up to the Lord by baptism. In 1804, these pleasing circumstances made it necessary to unroof the meeting-house, enlarge its dimensions, and erect a gallery in the front. The same encouraging causes continuing to operate, it was found expedient, in 1806, to construct a gallery on one side of the building; and, in 1808, to add a third on the remaining side.

In 1805, this society was cordially admitted into the New Connection; and, at the next annual meeting, they state that their number of members was forty-nine, and that they were well attended with hearers. For several succeeding years, the congregations were encouraging, but few appeared to be properly affected by the word preached. But, in 1810, some symptoms of revival appeared; and, not long afterwards, prayer-meetings, being established, were diligently attended. The friends of religion, sensible of the necessity of divine assistance to enable them successfully to promote its interest, were earnest and united in seeking for this important blessing. The happy results were soon apparent. Their assemblies were crowded with attentive hearers; and the word reached their hearts. In 1812, twelve were added by baptism, and in the year following thirteen. In 1814, the prosperity of

the cause induced them to add thirty-two feet to the length of the meeting-house, which increased it to seventy-two feet. Its breadth was thirty-three feet, with galleries all round. These various erections and additions cost nearly two thousand pounds; upwards of twelve hundred of which had, in 1817, been raised by the zealous exertions of the friends at Portsea, with the generous assistance of sister churches.

The cause continued to prosper: and, though they complain of the ravages made by death, the discouraging effects of the disorderly walk of individuals, and the distress arising from the pressure of the times; yet, in 1817, their number of members was one hundred and six, and the prospect encouraging.

The general baptist church at *Downton*, in Wiltshire, was founded before the Revolution.* Towards the close of the seventeenth century, it declined; and in 1699, the members were only thirteen. At that time, Mr. Benjamin Miller was called to the oversight of this drooping society, and continued to preside over it, with diligence and success, for nearly fifty years. He was removed by death, in 1747, when the members had increased to ninety-four, and the interest was respectable and flourishing. Mr. Miller was a minister of considerable eminence among the general baptists of his day; who raised him to the dignity of a messenger, and, for many years, chose him chairman of the general assembly in London.

For a long time after Mr. Miller's decease, the friends at Downton continued destitute of a pas-

* Vol. I. pp. 297, 352.

tor. They were occasionally visited by preachers from neighbouring churches ; and, at other times, were supplied with the ministration of the word by Mr. Bungey, one of their own members. About this period, several opulent friends enlarged the donations of the society, by generous endowments and bequests. This encouraged them, in 1764, to invite Mr. Brown, of Coventry, to settle with them as their minister. He complied ; but his stay was short : as, in less than two years, he left Downton. At length, in 1773, Mr. T. Twining, of Trowbridge, was ordained to the pastoral office among them. He enjoyed, in a high degree, the affections of his people : the cause revived, and many valuable members were added to the church. But this pleasing scene soon vanished. The opposition and avarice of some who had controul over the property of the church, induced Mr. Twining to resign his charge, in 1777.

Soon after his resignation, not only the endowments, but the meeting-house itself was withheld from the church : and a long and painful state of darkness ensued. The depressed people, deprived of the regular means of grace, were in danger of being scattered, and the cause appeared to be hastening towards extinction. But a private member stepped forwards, collected his friends together, and, by his exhortations and example, preserved a laudable degree of order and affection amongst them, through all this season of discouragement.

In 1783, Mr. Aldridge, of Lyndhurst, visited this oppressed society : and, pitying their situation, repeated his visits as often as circumstances would permit. These friendly interviews were very acceptable, and tended much to support the

hopes of the people. A few years afterwards, Mr. J. Deacon, of Leicester, passing through the town, was informed of the state of their affairs, and advised them to apply for assistance to the Deputies for the protection of the civil rights of Dissenters. They did so ; and were directed to lay a plain statement of their concerns before counsel, and request his opinion. A case was accordingly submitted to Mr. Maddocks, who encouraged them to hope for success, in a prudent attempt to recover their rights. In order to this, it was requisite that some person should be legally authorized to claim, as pastor, the emoluments and accommodations belonging to the church. They therefore requested Mr. Aldridge to accept the office, with which he complied : and, being regularly invested with it, made a formal demand of the meeting-house for public worship, and of the endowments for his support. This demand being refused, a bill was filed in Chancery, under the sanction of the committee, to enforce compliance. The contest was long and doubtful : but, after thirteen years of anxiety and prayer, a judgment was given in favour of the oppressed. The endowments were fully confirmed to the church ; and possession of the meeting-house was obtained by an arrangement with the holder.

During this anxious period, the cause of religion had made some progress. Several had joined the church from time to time ; and, in 1789, no fewer than eighteen were baptized.— Though affectionately grateful to Mr. Aldridge for the essential services which his friendship had rendered them, yet, as he could visit them but very seldom, it became desirable, on the favourable issue of the contest, to enjoy the pri-

vilege of a resident pastor. After some inquiry, they invited Mr. William Smedley, who had then finished his studies at the Academy, to visit them. His labours being acceptable, he was unanimously requested to become their pastor.— He was ordained, April 18th. 1804. Previous to the ordination, Mr. Aldridge solemnly resigned the office which he had assumed for the recovery of their rights; and the connection, that had subsisted nearly seventeen years, was dissolved with striking marks of reciprocal esteem and approbation. The service then proceeded: when Mr. D. Taylor addressed Mr. Smedley, from 1 Tim. iv. 12—16; and Mr. J. Kingsford the church, from Rom. xii. 4, 5.

In 1803, this church applied for admission into the New Connection, which it obtained the following year. It then consisted of twenty-eight members, the hearers were increasing, four had lately been baptized, and the prospects were encouraging. For several succeeding years, the cause continued to make a gradual, though slow, progress: but disaffection, which had long been silently gathering force, breaking out into dissension, a separation ensued, early in 1816; and Mr. Smedley removed from Downton, at the close of the year. Mr. Mead, a member of the church at Portsea, was invited to supply his place; and ordained to the pastoral office, June 12th. 1816. We have no account of the church at that time: in the preceding year the members amounted to forty-four.

At the close of the seventeenth century, the general baptist church at *Berkhamstead, Chesham and Tring*, was in a flourishing state, under the

joint superintendence of four elders.* All these active pastors, except Mr. Cook, were removed by death before 1712; but, at that time, there were six respectable assistant preachers: Messrs. T. Foster, W. Miller, J. King, J. Woodward, J. Anderson, and J. Widmer; and seven deacons. Towards the close of that year, "considering that they were many in number, and their places of abode far distant one from another, it was thought fit to choose another person to serve them in the capacity of an elder." Mr. Woodward was accordingly nominated to that office, and unanimously chosen. Soon afterwards, Mr. Foster and Mr. Widmer were proposed to the church, as candidates for the same station: the former was then elected; but, there being some difference of opinion with respect to the latter, several years elapsed before he attained that dignity.

The ministers of this society appear to have been highly respected by their sister churches. The general assembly, in 1717, nominated Mr. Cook to the office of Messenger; and, the year following, conferred a similar token of respect on Mr. Foster. The friends at Chesham refused their consent, at first, to Mr. Cook's elevation; though they yielded at length. But Mr. Foster was prevented, by domestic affliction, from accepting the honour. In a few years afterwards, Mr. Widmer was called to the same honourable station.

The cause continued to prosper, and new ministers were called forth, who laboured zealously and successfully in spreading the gospel. In 1723, they appear to have had ten respectable preachers, who were all diligently employed in different

* Vol. I. pp. 229—228.

parts of this extensive society. A very laudable attention was paid to discipline ; and a holy vigilance exercised over the conduct and welfare of the members. Seasons of solemn prayer and fasting were frequently observed, to implore the divine blessing and direction ; and days of thanksgiving appointed, when special mercies had been received. Such measures as these doubtless contributed much to the prosperity of vital religion amongst them.

In 1730, Mr. Cook, being indisposed and advanced in years, became incapable of much exertion. Mr. Butler, who had, for some time, been employed as an occasional preacher, was therefore called to assist him in the more active duties of his office ; and was ordained, May 17th. 1733, co-pastor with that venerable minister.

For a long season, the friends at Chesham adhered steadily to the doctrines on which the church was founded. So late as 1731, they, by a solemn church act, refused “to exchange in the work of preaching” with a minister whose sole offence appears to have been sitting in the general assembly with those who, as they believed, “countenanced the dreadful and dangerous errors of the late Mr. Caffin.” Success rewarded their constancy ; and, about 1735, it was found necessary to enlarge the meeting-house at Chesham. Probably Mr. Cook was then removed to his reward ; and Mr. Butler also appears to have died or to have left these parts, as we hear no more of him. The chief care of this extensive church, therefore, devolved on Mr. Sexton, who had been called to the work of the ministry so early as 1718. In 1744, Messrs. Trustram and Young, were nominated to the office of joint pastors with him ; but were not ordained, till

July 24th. 1749. In the following year, Mr. Sexton was raised to the dignity of a messenger. About the same period, the meeting-house at Tring was built: and Mr. Young the elder, with Mr. Cock, an assistant preacher, visited the baptized churches, in order to collect money to defray the expence of the erection. There were then a number of valuable theological works which belonged to the church, and were lent to the ministers and others for their perusal. And, in 1753, a baptistery was constructed in Chesham meeting-house.

Thus the cause seems to have proceeded, for a long season, from strength to strength; but, unhappily, the records of the succeeding twenty years are lost. The latter part of this interval was rendered mournfully interesting, by the removal of several valuable ministers. In July, 1762, Mr. Trustram, one of their pastors, died; and, in the ensuing year, Mr. Deely, an assistant preacher. Feb. 8th. 1775, Mr. Sexton, who had served this society with diligence and success, as minister, elder and messenger, for fifty-seven years, was called to the church above. His funeral sermon was preached by his colleague, Mr. Young; who, in two months, followed him to rest, dying April 13th. following.

This appears to have been the commencement of a time of gloom and declension. Sentiments widely differing from those on which the interest was founded, insinuated themselves among some of the leading persons; and gave rise to disputings and contentions, which, in several instances, led to divisions. For many years, the church declined in zeal, in discipline, in numbers and in a conversation becoming the gospel.— During this dark state, Messrs. Caleb Cock and

William Thrussell were ordained to the eldership, June 10th. 1775: and, in October, the following year, Mr. Pyall, of Headcorn in Kent, settled among them, "to assist in the work of the ministry."

In 1780, Mr. Cock was removed by death, when the members had decreased to one hundred and twelve. In that year, Mr. Edward Sexton, the grandson of their former elder of that name, was called to the work of the ministry; and laboured with so much acceptance and success, that he was ordained to the pastoral office, Sept. 14th. 1784. He presided, in conjunction with Mr. Thrussell, till 1796, when the latter removed from the church. Several young men were, about this time, brought forwards in the sacred work: amongst whom, Mr. Seabrook Young was so well approved, that his brethren invited him to become joint pastor with Mr. Sexton. He was ordained, April 11th. 1799; when Mr. D. Taylor gave the charge, from 1 Cor. iv. 2; and Mr. Hobbs. of Chatham, addressed the people, from 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. This union, which promised to be an important benefit to the cause, was of short duration: Mr. Young being snatched away by death, Feb. 10th. 1800; ten months after his ordination.

A short time previous to this afflicting event, the ministers of this society had extended their labours to Ashley-Green and Hawridge, villages within a few miles of Chesham. At both of these places, preaching was established, which was well attended, and continued, with encouraging success, to the close of our present period. Some time afterwards, the gospel was introduced at Friezden, a place two miles from Berkhamstead. Early in 1802, Mr. Joseph Hobbs, re-

moved from Chatham to this people; and, settling at Berkhamstead, became their regular preacher. His services being acceptable, he was ordained co-pastor with Mr. Sexton, Dec. 2nd. 1802. On this occasion, Mr. D. Taylor, addressed the pastor, from Acts xx. 28; the church, from 1 Thess. v. 13; and four deacons who were ordained at the same time, from 1 Pet. iv. 11.

These active and zealous colleagues prosecuted their sacred work with cordiality and success. The great Head of the church blest their endeavours to the re-establishment of their charge in their original principles of faith, and the revival of that regard to the discipline of the New Testament, which had distinguished their best days. The happy result was a pleasing increase in numbers and in graces. And being now decidedly of the same sentiments as those on which the New Connection was formed, they naturally sought an union with that body. In 1809, this union was effected. The number of members then was one hundred and fifty: they were peaceful and making vigorous exertions for the spread of the gospel. In the following year, agreeably to the advice of the Association, they invited Mr. John Ewen, who was then leaving the Academy, to preach among them. His labours being approved, he settled at Tring, in 1810; and became a regular assistant minister in this increasing church.

The cause continued to revive: peace reigned in their councils, the congregations improved at the three stations, and additions were frequent. In 1817, the members had risen to two hundred and twenty-two: of whom, one hundred and sixty resided at Chesham and its neighbourhood; forty, at Berkhamstead; and the remainder, at Tring.

Many young men were, from time to time, called to the ministry by this society, who became useful pastors of other churches. Among these may be mentioned, Mr. Hobbs, who, in 1705, was chosen pastor by the society at High Wycomb, and afterwards raised to the messenger's office. Mr. Birch, who, in 1721, was settled over a church in Northamptonshire: Mr. Young, who, in 1753, removed to Yarmouth;* Mr. James Drowley, who settled at Lewes; Mr. J. Kingsford, who removed to Portsmouth and became pastor of the society at Portsea; and Mr. J. Sexton, pastor of Ford church: besides Mr. Payne, who, in 1816, went to labour at Morcott; and Mr. Darvill, who was then chiefly employed at Wendover.

The general baptist church at *Ipswich*, in Suffolk, owes its rise to the labours of Mr. W. Jackson, who was originally a member of the society at Deal, in Kent. Removing to Ipswich on account of business, and not finding a church of his own denomination within less than forty miles, he united himself with a few methodists. By their persuasion, he was induced to go into the adjacent villages, to preach the gospel; and was made the instrument of awakening in many an attention to the concerns of eternity. But some of these converts being afterwards baptized by

* This Mr. William Young afterwards settled at Bourn (See page 417.) Though unsuccessful as a pastor, he seems to have been a man of considerable attainments in classical learning. He kept a school at Bourn; and was in habits of intimacy with several dignitaries of the church of England, with whom he maintained a literary correspondence. And so highly did one of them esteem his abilities for composition, that he occasionally employed him to write his sermons, when he was called to preach on particular occasions; and shared the emoluments with his dissenting friend.

immersion, his associates became jealous of his influence, and wished him to conceal his sentiments on that subject. This he refused to promise, and an amicable separation ensued.

About this time, the Derby militia lay at Ipswich ; among whom were several members of the general baptist churches in the midland counties. These men, hearing of this rupture, sought out Mr. Jackson, and encouraged him to procure a suitable place for public worship. A room was accordingly hired and licensed ; which was opened June 18th. 1809. At first, there were but eight attended ; but the room was soon filled with serious hearers. In a short time, seven persons proposed themselves for baptism. The pastor of the church at Norwich, being invited, visited them ; and, Aug. 3d. 1809, baptized the candidates, and formed them into a church state.—They immediately chose Mr. Jackson for their minister, and went on their way rejoicing.

Being obliged to leave two rooms in succession, they wished for a more certain place of worship. They therefore engaged the owner of a house which had been burnt down to rebuild it ; and agreed to pay him a yearly rent of twenty-five pounds. This place, which would accommodate three hundred people, they furnished with a pulpit and pews, to the amount of nearly fifty pounds. It was opened, April 22d. 1810. The expence of fitting it up being too heavy for the members of this infant society, who were all poor, the minister applied to the churches in Kent ; and, by their liberality, discharged the debt. In this house the cause continued to advance : many being added to their number, and the hearers increasing. But the rent proved a great clog to their exertions ; and, being obliged

to give a year's notice before they left it, they determined, at Christmas 1811, to inform the owner that they would quit it at the termination of the year, and to trust to divine Providence for their future accommodation. A few days after they had given this intimation, a builder voluntarily proposed to erect a meeting-house for them on very reasonable terms. They accepted his offer; and the new building was opened, May 27th. 1812, by Mr. D. Taylor, of London, and Mr. J. Preston, of Great Suffolk-street. On the following day, Mr. Jackson was ordained to the pastoral office; when Mr. D. Taylor addressed the minister, from Acts xx. 24; and Mr. Preston the people, from 1 Thess. 12, 13. In the evening, several brethren were ordained to the deacon's office; to whom Mr. Taylor delivered a charge, from 1 Pet. iv. 11.—The friends at Ipswich made very laudable exertions to assist in defraying the expences of this building: but, when they had done their utmost, a debt of upwards of four hundred pounds remained; which was long a heavy burden on the cause, and tended greatly to prevent its progress.

In 1813, this society was placed on the List of churches forming the New Connection. It then consisted of fifty-three members; twenty-three of whom had been added in the year preceding. For a time, the cause prospered; the congregations were large; and, in the space of three years, fifty-four persons were baptized on a profession of faith. But it could not reasonably be expected that this prosperity should continue without interruption. Such a rapid increase of members must, almost unavoidably, introduce some improper characters; and, especially when all the members of the church, and even the of-

ficers, were little acquainted with the order and duties of church-fellowship, must produce a degree of anarchy inconsistent with the real welfare of the cause. This was the case at Ipswich. In 1816, they complain of irregularities which caused difficulties. These difficulties increased in the following year; and they were under the painful necessity of excluding many on account of their disorderly conduct. This caused dissatisfaction in others, and they withdrew from communion. In June 1817, however, the storm appears to have, in some degree, subsided, and the congregation had begun to improve. The number of members then was forty-six.

In 1813, a small society of general baptists at *Chatham* in Kent was admitted into the New Connection. They had separated from the ancient church of that denomination, which we have already noticed.* For more than half of the eighteenth century, that society had been under the care of Mr. Neale. He died about 1792, and was succeeded by Mr. Joseph Hobbs, who had, for some time, assisted them in the ministry. About 1800, dissensions arose respecting points of faith; and a separation ensued. Mr. Hobbs and his friends withdrew, and formed themselves into a distinct society, at the house of one of their members. In the spring of 1802, Mr. Hobbs removed to Berkhamstead; and, after his departure, they were supplied with preaching by Mr. S. Garrett, who continued to labour amongst them to the close of our present period. Their number appears never to have exceeded seventeen: and, in 1817, it had sunk to twelve.

* Vol. I. pp. 270, 722.

Wrotham is a market-town in Kent, twenty-four miles south-east of London. At this place, Mr. G. Purcell, who then served the ancient general baptist church at Bessell's-Green, commenced preaching, May, 1815, on the Lord's-day evenings. The auditors were attentive; and, considering circumstances, numerous. In the ensuing year, Mr. Purcell, finding it necessary, on account of difference of sentiments, to separate from the friends at Bessell's Green, he was enabled, by the liberal assistance of a pious individual, to remove to Wrotham, and make an attempt there to found an interest. A room was hired, and regular service established. In a few months, three persons were baptized; who, with the minister and his wife, formed themselves into a church state. In 1817, this small society was placed on the List of the New Connection; and it was hoped that, under the divine blessing, this weak attempt might be crowned with ultimate success.

SECT. 5.—*A List of the Churches which composed the New Connection of General Baptists, A.D. 1817, with a Scheme of their Origin.*

HAVING thus glanced at the proceedings of the various churches which composed the New Connection, we shall present the reader with a List of them and the number of members in each, in the order of the respective districts; assuming, as our authority, the Returns made to the annual Association at Castle-Donington, June, 1817, and published in the Minutes of that assembly.

I. THE MIDLAND DISTRICT.*Members.*

1 Barton	312
2 Hugglescote.....	157
3 Melbourn.....	227
4 Packington and Ashby	127
5 Cauldwell	66
6 Kegworth.....	97
7 Sutton Bonington...	65
8 Long-Whatton and } Belton..... }	77
9 Ilkiston and Smalley .	171
10 Castle-Donington ...	245
11 Loughborough	252
12 Rothley.....	72
13 Woodhouse-Eaves ...	56
14 Quorndon	149
15 Leake & Wimeswould	192
16 Broughton.....	73
17 Friar-lane, Leicester.	185
18 Archdeacon-lane, do.	89
19 Hinckley	106
20 Thurlaston, &c.....	111
21 Wolvey.....	99
22 Longford	108
23 Birmingham	201
24 Sutton Coldfield....	47
25 Nottingham.....	436
26 Kirkby-Woodhouse..	47
27 Gamston and Retford	87
28 Derby.....	154
29 Duffield	203
30 Ashford.....	16
31 Abney and Bradwell .	9
32 Austrey.....	131
33 Beeston.....	106

Members.

34 Nantwich.....	10
35 Knipton.....	11

*In the Midland District, 4494***II. THE NORTHERN DISTRICT.**

36 Birchcliff	199
37 Heptonstall-Slack ...	177
38 Shore	36
39 Queenshead	142
40 Halifax	71
41 Burnley	25
42 Lidgate.....	11
43 Stayley-Bridge.....	80

*In the Northern District, 741***III. THE LINCOLNSHIRE DISTRICT.**

44 Boston	93
45 Maltby	*8
46 Fleet	130
47 Killingholme.....	30
48 Gosberton.....	22
49 Sutterton	26
50 Tydd St. Giles'.....	65
51 Wisbeach	104
52 St. Ives'.....	27
53 Kirton	31
54 Louth	80
55 Spalding.....	62
56 Bourn.....	54
57 Peterborough	34
58 March.....	91
59 Fornsett St. Peter's..	69

	<i>Members.</i>		<i>Members.</i>
60 Epworth & Butter- wick	} 50	64 Great Suffolk Street. *34	106
61 Morcott	*20	65 Portsea.....	44
62 Misterton.....	9	66 Downton	222
<i>In the Lincolnshire District</i>	<u>1005</u>	67 Berkhamstead, &c... 68 Ipswich.....	46
IV. THE LONDON DISTRICT.		69 Chatham.....	12
63 Church Lane.....	137	70 Wrotham.....	5
		<i>In the London District,</i>	<u>606</u>

ABSTRACT.

Midland District,	35 churches	4494 Members
Northern District,	8 ditto	741 ditto
Lincolnshire District,	19 ditto	1005 ditto
London District,	8 ditto	606 ditto

The New Connection 70 churches 6846 Members

*** The number of Members in these churches has been corrected by subsequent information: the result will therefore differ a little from the result in the Minutes.

PERHAPS the following *Scheme of the Origin* of these societies may not be uninteresting to the attentive reader.

In the Midland District,

BARTON the parent society, formed in 1745, was divided, in 1760, into the Churches of BARTON, MELBOURN, KEGWORTH, LOUGHBOROUGH, and KIRKBY-WOODHOUSE.

From BARTON Church were formed,
Hinckley Church, in 1766;
Hugglescote Church, in 1798.

From Hinckley Church arose
Longford Church, in 1773 ;
Thurlaston Church, in 1814 ;
Wolvey Church, in 1815.

From MELBOURN church were formed,
Cauldwell church, in 1785 ;
Ashby and Packington, in 1807.

From Ashby and Packington church, arose
Austrey church, in 1808.

From KEGWORTH church were formed,
Ilkiston and Smalley church, in 1785 ;
Castle-Donington church, in 1785 ;
Sutton Bonington church, in 1798 ;
Longwhatton and Belton, in 1799.

From LOUGHBOROUGH church arose,
Leake and Wimeswould church, in 1782 ;
Quorndon church, in 1804 ;
Rothley church, in 1802.

From Leake church was formed,
Broughton church, in 1806.

From Rothley church sprung,
Woodhouse Eaves church, in 1808.

The following churches were not formed from any single church : but were raised by the united efforts of several societies.

Sutton Coldfield church, in 1775 ;
Birmingham church, in 1786 ;
Nottingham church, in 1775 ;
Beeston church, in 1804 ;
Derby church, in 1791 ; from which was formed,
Duffield church, in 1810.

Besides these original churches, a few others in the midland counties joined the New Connection, which, though founded long before the commencement of that union, had declined and were almost extinct. These were,

Friar-lane church, Leicester, from which arose,

Archdeacon-lane church, in 1794.

Ashford church, from which was formed,

Bradwell and Abney church, in 1811.

Gamston and Retford church.

Nantwich church.

Knipton church.

In the Northern District.

From BIRCHCLIFF, the parent church, formed
1763, arose,

Queenshead church, in 1773 ;

Burnley church, in 1780 ;

Shore church, in 1795.

Heptonstall Slack church, in 1807.

From Queenshead church was formed,
Halifax church, in 1782.

Lidgate church was founded by the joint exertions of the Yorkshire ministers, in 1816.

Stayley Bridge church was formed independently of all others, in 1808.

In the Lincolnshire and London Districts, the churches had generally existed long before they joined the New Connection, except

Sutterton church, which was separated from
Gosberton, in 1808 ;

Tydd St. Giles' church, from Long Sutton in 1788;

Louth church, formed in 1802 ;

Forncett St. Peter's church, in 1814 ;

Portsea church, in 1802 ;

Ipswich church, in 1809 ;
Wrotham church, in 1816.

SECT. 6.—*The Transactions of the New Connection as a body, from A.D. 1800 to A.D. 1817.*

THE transactions of the New Connection as a body, during the first seventeen years of the nineteenth century, though numerous and important, consisted chiefly in the prosecution of plans previously formed ; and therefore will not demand a long detail in this brief sketch of the proceedings of that period.

The Academy, for the instruction of young men preparing for the ministry, was continued, with satisfaction and success, for many years, under its first tutor, Mr. Dan Taylor. A considerable number of the pupils who had enjoyed the advantage of his instructions, became useful and acceptable ministers of the gospel, and respectable pastors of churches. But, in 1812, various circumstances united to introduce a degree of embarrassment into the concerns of this institution ; which induced the subscribers and supporters, who had till then conducted the undertaking by a committee chosen annually from themselves, to resign the management of it into the hands of the annual Association. This was done at the Association at Birmingham, June, 1813 ; and the charge was accepted by that assembly. On this occasion, the funds of the institution were declared to be designed “to support an Academy for such young men of approved ministerial abilities as could devote their whole time to preparatory studies ; and, by pecuniary grants, to assist those young preachers in the pur-

suit of knowledge, who could not leave their stations." It was also resolved, "that the design of the Association, by the maintenance of this institution, was to promote and cherish the sentiments contained in the Articles, drawn up and signed, in the year 1770, at the formation of the New Connection." Having thus defined their object, they appointed a committee to prepare a plan for the effectual accomplishment of it. On the recommendation of this committee, various principles and regulations were adopted for the future management of the institution. Mr. D. Taylor being in his seventy-fifth year, the Association felt itself obliged, though very reluctantly, to look out for a younger man to superintend the Academy. They, therefore, after expressing their deep and grateful sense of the valuable services of the former Tutor, of his firm attachment to the principles of the Connection, and of his long and valuable labours to promote its interest, chose Mr. J. Jarrom for his successor. Mr. Jarrom accepted the appointment; and the Academy was accordingly transferred to Wisbeach. In 1817, it consisted of five students.

In 1802, after the failure of the General Baptist Magazine, Mr. Adam Taylor, at the request of the Association at London, undertook to publish a periodical miscellany, under the title of "The General Baptist Repository." It was designed to serve as a register of the transactions of the New Connection, as a medium of communication and appeal on subjects of general interest, and as a repository of original communications. At first, a number appeared every six months; but, in 1810, it began to be published every three months: and continued to be supported to the close of the period now under review.

In 1814, a writer in the General Baptist Repository proposed a plan, by which he supposed the debts and incumbrances which depressed and shackled many churches, might easily be removed. His proposal was, for each member of the Connection to subscribe one penny monthly, for this express purpose. By this means, he calculated, that he should raise, annually, two hundred pounds, towards the accomplishment of his design. This paper attracted attention; and the subject was brought forwards, at the ensuing Association, at Leicester. The result was, an attempt to establish "a Fund for religious purposes." A list of objects to which relief should be afforded was drawn up, and approved. But, though the plan was resumed the following year, and officers chosen, nothing permanent was effected. Probably an attempt to accomplish too much prevented the success of the scheme.

Considerable difficulty had often been experienced, in the efforts made by the ministers of the New Connection, to spread the gospel, through the want of pecuniary means: and many opportunities of doing good had been lost, because the expence of improving them would have fallen on individuals, unable to bear it. By these means, the energies of the friends of religion were cramped, and their exertions checked. At the Association in London, June, 1810, a proposal was made, that a minister should be requested to visit certain ancient general baptist churches in Lincolnshire, which had fallen into decay. The visit was unanimously allowed to be desirable, and likely to produce much good; but the usual previous question, "Who will defray the expences of the journey?" had nearly quashed the motion. A worthy private member of the Asso-

ciation, observing this, stept forwards, and suggested the propriety of raising a fund, expressly devoted to meet the expences of attempts that might be made to spread the gospel, or to revive it where it had decayed. The hint was unanimously approved ; and fifteen pounds were immediately subscribed, towards carrying it into effect. This was afterwards denominated “ the Itinerant Fund ;” and met with considerable support. Its utility was eminently manifest in the number and the success of the attempts made, in following years, under its patronage. In the year, ending June 24th. 1817, upwards of seventy-one pounds had been paid from it, for the supplying of destitute churches, and the formation and encouragement of new interests. Mr. J. Heard, of London, was chosen Treasurer.

As the Connection increased, it became more necessary to have some mode of admitting and dismissing churches, that might secure the primary objects of the union. In 1802, the church at Castle-Donington sent a case to the Association at London, “ requesting that assembly to endeavour to form some rule, by which churches might be received into the Connection, and, when necessity required it, excluded from it.” After due deliberation, it was however replied, that “ the diversity of circumstances in those cases was so great, that no invariable rule could be laid down.” In this unsettled state it remained till 1815 ; when Mr. James Taylor presented a case to the Association at Nottingham, inquiring, “ Would it not be advisable to form some rules for our Association and Connection ; especially for the admission and exclusion of churches and individuals ?” After some discussion, the subject was referred to the following Association at

Boston, in 1816. It was then considered at great length, and occasioned some warmth. At length, it was resolved, by a large majority, "That the Connection continue to adhere to the religious principles on which it was established, in 1770: and that all churches which may hereafter be admitted into it, satisfy it that they maintain the same; and if any church in the connection depart from these principles either in doctrine or practice, and by proper steps cannot be reclaimed, it shall be excluded from the Connection." A committee was then appointed to devise the best means of carrying this resolution into effect: and, on their recommendation, two rules were adopted: one prescribing the mode of procedure in the admission of churches; and the other, the steps to be pursued when exclusion became necessary.—This resolution and the rules founded on it, produced a considerable sensation in some parts of the Connection; but, at the succeeding association, in 1817, they were confirmed, with very little opposition.

The Circular Letters, annexed to the Minutes of the annual Associations, in this period, were on important subjects, and from various pens. Mr. D. Taylor drew up the epistle for 1801, on "The concurrence of people with their ministers in promoting the interest of Christ." In 1802, no letter having been prepared, the same minister was requested to write "an Address to the Connection, founded on a view of the state of the churches." The Letter, for 1805, "on the Atonement of Christ;" and, for 1809, "on Covetousness,"* were also by the same author. Mr W.

* After this Letter had been read to the Association, approved and ordered to be printed, it was, by some mistake, lost before publication; and therefore never appeared.

Felkin addressed the churches, in 1803, on “the Nature and Objects of saving Faith :” and, in 1808, on “Spiritual Mindedness.” Mr. J. Free-ston wrote the circular, for 1804, on “the Doubts and Fears of Christians, their Source and Cure;” and, for 1806, on “Private Prayer.” Mr. W. Pickering, in 1807, recommended “a conscientious Attendance on Meetings for prayer, exhortation and church business :” and, in 1816, animated his brethren to “Christian Zeal.” In 1810, Mr. John Taylor wrote a long letter on the important subject of “the religious Education of Children.” Mr. J. Jarrom, in 1811, explained “the Importance and Influence of religious Principle.” Mr. R. Smith, in 1812, wrote the circular on “Perseverance :” and, in 1813, Mr. T. Stevenson exhorted his brethren to “Public Spirit in promoting religion.” In the following year, the death of Mr. Burgess, who had been requested to write the circular letter, disappointed the expectation of his friends ;* but, in 1815, Mr. Bissill took up the subject, “Directions and Encouragements to Christians in times of temporal Distress.” In 1817, Mr. J. Pike was required to state and enforce the “Scriptural Motives for vigorous Exertion in spreading the Gospel among the Heathen.”

SECT. 7.—*Miscellaneous Notices—Conferences—Aged Ministers’ Fund—Derby Religious Tract Society—Sunday Schools—Friendly Societies—Religious Benefit Societies—General Baptist Missionary Society.*

* The Articles of 1770, were reprinted this year, as a substitute for the circular Letter.

BESIDES the annual Association, of which we have already given a sufficient account, a Conference of the ministers and representatives of the churches is established in each district of the New Connection, which claims some notice in a work of this nature.

The *Midland*, or, as it was originally denominated, the *Leicestershire Conference*, took its rise from the weekly meetings of the first ministers, mentioned in a former part of this history.* After the division of the original body into distinct churches, it was found expedient to continue regular meetings of the officers and brethren of the various societies, to consult for the general good. These meetings were supported by all the general baptist churches in the counties of Leicester, Derby, Nottingham and Warwick; and held, every two or three months, at each place in rotation. At each Conference, there were generally two sermons, preached by ministers previously appointed by the church at which it was held. For a long series of years, this Conference was maintained with great harmony and advantage; but, at length, the extension of the cause and the number of churches, suggested the propriety of forming them into two classes. This division was effected in 1803; and two Conferences formed: the one, under the denomination of the *Nottinghamshire Conference*, including the churches at Derby, Kegworth, Melbourn, Donington, Leake, Broughton, Sutton Bonington, Ilkiston, Nottingham, Kirkby-Woodhouse, Ashford and Long-Whatton; the other, which retained the name of the *Leicestershire Conference*, comprehending the societies at Loughborough,

* Supra p. 67.

Quorndon, Rothley, Leicester, Hinckley, Longford, Birmingham, Cauldwell, Barton, Hugglescote and Packington. In order to cultivate mutual acquaintance and affection between the two districts, an union Conference, including both, was annually held alternately at Kegworth and Loughborough. This plan was pursued till 1810; when, supposing that acting separately tended to weaken their strength, they reunited, and formed what has since been called the *Midland Conference*. In 1813, the churches composing this Conference were ranged in four districts; in each of which the meeting was proposed to be held once every year. This plan being found convenient, was confirmed in 1817.

The continued spread of the cause so enlarged the extent of this district, that the Conference became difficult of access to those churches which were situated at its limits. This induced the friends at Birmingham, Austrey, Longford, Wolvey, and adjacent places, to establish a separate meeting, under the name of the *Warwickshire Conference*. It assembled, for the first time, at Sutton-Coldfield, Sept. 27th. 1816. The meetings were held every three months, and promised to be very useful in the promotion of the cause of Christ in those parts.

The *Yorkshire Conference* was begun, in 1772, by Messrs. Dan and John Taylor, when there were no other general baptist ministers in the northern district. At its commencement, it was confined to ministers; soon afterwards the officers of the church were admitted; and ultimately it was opened to the ministers, the officers, and as many of the private members of any of the churches as chose to attend. The meetings were held every two months; and the professed design

was to consult together on the best means of promoting the mutual benefit of the ministers, the good of the respective churches, and the glory of God. At each meeting, three enquiries were made: "1. What have we heard or known of each other as preachers and of our preaching since the last meeting? 2. What difficulties have we to mention? 3. What more can be done to promote religion among us?" Under one or other of these questions, the whole business was disposed: and much useful discussion often took place. A sermon was preached at each conference.

The first meeting of the *Lincolnshire Conference* was held at Gosberton, June 23rd. 1791. As Mr. Burgess, who had been labouring in the ministry at Halifax in Yorkshire, had seen the advantages resulting from the conferences in the northern district, he endeavoured, soon after his settlement at Fleet, to establish similar meetings in Lincolnshire. His endeavours were successful; and the principles and regulations of the Yorkshire conference were adopted, with little variation, by the new conference. It was held every three months, and a discourse delivered at each meeting. In 1815, several regulations for conducting these meetings were adopted, a scheme for the rotation of the conferences was fixed, and it was agreed to have two public services at each conference.

The *London Conference* owes its existence to Mr. D. Taylor, who invited a few friends to meet him at Chatham, Sept. 11th. 1799; when it was determined to hold a conference twice in the year, to consult on the most proper methods of promoting the interest of the Lord Jesus Christ. At each of these meeting, two sermons

were preached, the state of the churches connected with it reported, and the question, "What steps can we take more effectually to promote the religion of Jesus?" proposed to each one present.

All these Conferences existed in full vigour at the period when this work concludes. They had contributed essentially to the prosperity of the New Connection. By these interviews, the bonds of friendship among ministers were cemented, and their drooping spirits cheered; they were animated to activity and faithfulness in the cause of their common Master; and instructed in the best means of supporting it. The people had the opportunity of obtaining the advice of judicious and disinterested friends, in difficult or delicate cases; and of having their faith, hope, and obedience strengthened, by hearing the same sacred truths enforced and motives urged by the ministers of other churches, which their own preachers were daily labouring to impress on their minds.

In 1808, a Fund was established at Loughborough, chiefly supported by the general baptist churches in Lincolnshire, under the designation of "*The Aged Ministers' Fund*," of which Mr. Jarvis Miller was chosen Treasurer. Its object was to furnish assistance to aged and decayed ministers—to aid indigent churches in supporting their ministers—and to assist destitute congregations in obtaining proper supplies. For some years, it was little known, except in its immediate vicinity; but, towards the close of the present period, in consequence of repeated appeals in the General Baptist Repository, it obtained increased patronage. Previous to April

30th. 1817, this laudable institution, had advanced upwards of two hundred and forty pounds, towards the accomplishment of its benevolent purposes.

A society was formed at Derby, Sept. 1810, denominated "*The Derby General Baptist Religious Tract Society* :" the object of which was the gratuitous distribution of religious tracts.— Though it did not receive that extensive encouragement, which, from its obvious utility, might have been expected ; yet, besides purchasing a considerable quantity of tracts from other societies, it printed large editions of several valuable original pieces. As it was only in its infancy at the close of our account, it may be hoped, that it would, in future years, become better known and more justly appreciated, by the denomination to which it was devoted.

The churches of the New Connection early and zealously countenanced those useful institutions, *Sunday Schools*. In 1808, a scheme was proposed to secure the co-operation of the teachers and friends of the rising generation in the midland district ; and, for several years, an annual meeting of the delegates from the various institutions was held at Loughborough. In 1811, this assembly was attended by the representatives of thirty-seven general baptist sunday schools, in which three thousand seven hundred children were instructed, by five hundred and eighty five gratuitous teachers and fifty assistants. The object continued to be pursued by the churches with increasing assiduity, and the happy effects were highly encouraging. Nor were these exertions confined to the midland counties : in

1815, eight flourishing general baptist schools were united to the South Lincolnshire and Isle-of-Ely Sunday School Union. In the northern district, the same object was pursued with equal alacrity and success. In short, it appears from the accounts which have reached us, that, in 1817, there were very few churches in the New Connection which did not support a sunday school ; and it is probable, that more than seven thousand children then received instruction under their patronage.

In many of these churches, *Friendly Societies* were formed, with a design, under the divine blessing, of administering religious instruction and consolation to the ignorant and afflicted, when lying on the bed of sickness or approaching the hour of dissolution ; and to alleviate their temporal necessities, by pecuniary assistance. These societies were chiefly supported by subscriptions of a penny weekly ; and, in many instances, were rendered highly beneficial to the present and eternal welfare of the objects. One of these institutions, though not peculiarly noted either for its numbers or zeal, in the two years previous to Oct. 1817, paid three hundred and twenty-seven visits, to eighty objects, and distributed amongst them upwards of thirty-three pounds.

Religious Benefit Societies were also instituted in several of the congregations, to provide funds for the support of the members in times of sickness and expence. The most noted of these was the *Christian Fund*, which was established, in 1773, by a few members of the church at Fleet. After encountering various difficulties and re-

verses, it obtained considerable countenance among the churches in the Lincolnshire district. In 1817, it consisted of upwards of two hundred and fifty members: and had distributed, during the preceeding seventeen years, more than two thousand two hundred pounds. These sums were raised by subscriptions of one shilling monthly from all the members, and the benevolent assistance of the more affluent, who, as honorary members, subscribed for the benefit of others. These generous friends composed, at least, one fifth of the number of subscribers. An annual general meeting of the friends and supporters of the institution was held, in January, at Fleet: when a sermon was preached, and the business of the society transacted. Similar institutions were established at March and Tydd St. Giles'; and the result was equally satisfactory.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, considerable attention was excited, in various parts of the union, to the subject of foreign missions. Many respectable friends, indeed, feared that the Connection did not possess sufficient strength to attempt a separate mission; and, therefore, recommended it to the churches to lend what assistance they could to the particular baptist society. Some local circumstances, however, roused the zeal of the friends at Nottingham, and they commenced a subscription to support a general baptist mission. They also recommended the subject to the midland conference, and that meeting proposed it to the churches and the annual Association at Boston, in 1816. The Association expressed its hearty approbation of the design, and advised the friends of the object immediately to form themselves

into a society for the prosecution of it. This was accordingly done: and a new institution was formed, under the title of "*The General Baptist Missionary Society.*" A treasurer, secretary, and committee were chosen to manage the concerns of the infant society, and measures adopted to forward its object. But the progress and success of this attempt must necessarily be left to the historian of future years.

SECT. 8.—*A brief Sketch of the Discipline and Faith of the New Connection of General Baptists.*

THE churches composing the New Connection of General Baptists were, in their discipline, strictly congregational. They considered that a church of Christ was a society of faithful men, voluntarily associated to support the interests of religion and enjoy its privileges, according to their own views of those sacred subjects. They believed, that each society was competent to manage its own concerns; and allowed of no foreign controul, not even from their own conferences or association. The executive power of a church, they conceived, to be lodged in the members regularly assembled. The laws by which they are to proceed, they maintained to be the precepts of Christ, in the New Testament: of the intent and application of which, every church and each individual had a right to form his own judgment. And, while they disclaimed all external authority, they were equally jealous of undue internal influence: holding their rights as church members sacred against the encroachment of their own officers. It may, therefore, be supposed, that their modes of proceeding

in matters of discipline were diversified; and that the same society did not, at all times, preserve a consistency in its decisions. Whatever case occurred, or question arose, it became a subject of discussion, at their church-meetings; and was determined, according to the judgment or the will of a majority of those who happened to be present. This mode of proceeding doubtless had its inconveniences; but they esteemed it to be the appointment of the great Head of the church, and therefore most to his glory and their own edification. This, however, renders it impracticable to detail their system of discipline; as no such system, as applied to them as a Connection, ever existed.

The doctrinal sentiments of the New Connection, on some important subjects, were stated in the six articles adopted at its formation. But, as these were intended to declare their views only on a few disputed points, the reader may be desirous of seeing a more comprehensive account of their faith; and we are happy in being able to gratify him. When Mr. Dan Taylor removed to London, he read a "Confession of his Faith" to the society in Church-lane, which, by their direction, was entered in their records. As Mr. Taylor was then confessedly at the head of the Connection; and as that church "thoroughly approved of this Confession," it may be presumed to speak the general sentiments of the body; and will form an appropriate conclusion of this History.

Mr. Dan Taylor's Confession of Faith, read and approved, at a special Church-meeting of the General Baptist Society, in Church-lane, White-chapel, June 1st. 1785.

1. I BELIEVE that the whole creation gives proofs of a Deity ; and that man is capable of forming such reasonings and arguments from the evidence of wisdom and power presented to our view in the several objects that our eyes daily behold, as are sufficient to manifest the workmanship of One, who is infinitely superior to mere mortals. But, however evident this may be, and how certainly soever all nations of the world have experienced the truth of it ; yet the most sagacious mortal never was, nor ever will be, able to conceive clearly of God, nor of those things which are necessary to give comfort and satisfaction, respecting future happiness or the way to enjoy that happiness, by the light of nature. Therefore, as far as we can judge, there is an apparent necessity of a fuller discovery of the mind of God to man than the light of nature, in order to understand how we can be accepted with him.

2. That the great God has therefore been pleased, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to make himself known and to reveal his will to man, by voices, visions, &c. by the ministry of the prophets and of his own Son ; and afterwards by his apostles : and has given such full evidence, by miracles, prophecies and otherwise, that they all received their mission from heaven, that there is no just reason to doubt of it.

3. That these instructions are since collected, by divine appointment, into one book, called the

Bible, and preserved, by divine Providence, for the illumination of a dark world, in spite of many efforts that have been made use of to destroy them.

4. That the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are given by inspiration of God, as a full and sufficient revelation of his will to mortals: and, that we may learn from thence, whatever is needful to be known in order to enjoy present and everlasting felicity. That there is no other book in existence that can lay a just claim to divine inspiration besides the Scriptures. And that nothing is to be added to them by the invention or tradition of men, or from any opinion or authority whatever; and, that nothing can with impunity be substituted in the stead of any part of them. That we have no authority to expect nor can we with safety depend upon, any other revelation or suggestion whatever besides the scriptures: they are our only rule in every branch of practice and faith; and are sufficiently plain to every one who reads them with attention and is willing to follow them: so that all others are without excuse.

5. That the Scriptures give us a clear and sufficient account of the Blessed God, and teach us, that he is infinitely wise, powerful and holy; that he is eternal and immutable; that he knows all things; that he is good, kind and pitiful to all men, and is not willing that any should perish; that he is invariably faithful to all his promises and threatenings. That God is one; yet there are Three represented by the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who have communion in one Godhead, and have proper Deity ascribed to them all. But I cannot find, that any man has yet learned from scripture to describe how

these three are united in one Godhead ; nor the exact modes of their distinction. Nor do I pretend to be able to give an exact account of this mystery.—As I do not find them called in Scripture, three Persons, I do not chuse to call them so myself ; but, I neither wish to condemn nor to contend with those who think it proper to use this manner of speech.

6. That the great God formed all things by his powerful word ; and preserves, supports, supplies and controuls the whole creation ; and even overrules the wickedness of men and devils by the same power for his own glory and according to the counsel of his own will.

7. That the great God, for his own praise and glory, formed and continually supports two classes of intelligent beings ; i. e. Angels and Men ; who are the principal subjects of his kingdom, and are under the most indispensible obligations to do his will, and consecrate themselves to serve his interest and promote his glory ; and, that he justly demands this of them. That some of the Angels rebelled against him, and are consigned to everlasting woe, hopeless ; while others continued in obedience and kept their first estate, and so continue happy in his presence. That these fallen angels, or one of these, by a stratagem led our first parents into rebellion against their Maker ; and hereby this world of ours, which would otherwise have been a place of felicity, is become a region of iniquity, misery and death.

8. That, in consequence of this first sin, all mankind lost their primitive rectitude, and are all prone to rebel against God ; and, when they come to understanding, do actually rebel against God, and are, in consequence of that rebellion,

exposed to his wrath as the just punishment of it. That in consequence of this revolt from God and rebellion against him, mankind can never be happy, till their sins be pardoned and their hearts purified.

9. That the moral law requires all men to love God, with all their heart, with all their mind, with all their soul, and with all their strength, and to love their neighbour as themselves: and, that this is the test of right and wrong, and the only rule of every man's conduct. That all men are transgressors of it both in temper and life, and are hereby exposed to condemnation; from which they cannot recover themselves by any duties they are capable of performing. Therefore, that salvation is not of works, but of free grace. That all that is done for us, or given to us, or wrought in us, or that we are able to do for him, is entirely of the free, rich and undeserved bounty of the great and blessed God; whom we have grievously offended by our iniquities, and who might justly consign us to punishment for them.

10. That God is loving, tender and compassionate, towards poor sinful men: and, in order to preserve his justice inviolate, to maintain the honour of his holy law, and the dignity and rectitude of his government, and yet to make condemned sinners everlastinglly happy, he has brought in a new covenant; in which he has given his dear Son to be man's surety, to take our nature and place under the law which we have broken, and by which we are justly condemned; and to suffer for our sins. So that now, in perfect consistency with law and justice, with honour to his government, and all his glorious perfections, he can and does treat with mankind

on a new foundation, in a way of free grace ; and can now be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

11. I believe, that, in our stead, Jesus has, by dying for us, made reconciliation for our iniquities, brought in everlasting righteousness, and provided a complete and free salvation for miserable sinners, and for all sinners without exception.

12. That this glorious salvation, with all the various blessings contained in it, is plainly revealed in scripture, and proclaimed to the world in the gospel, accompanied with such invitations and promises, directions and threatenings, as are directly calculated to answer the purpose and suit the circumstances of fallen men ; to allure and incline the will as a rational appetite, and to beget the fallen soul anew, and bring it home to God ; to dispose it to the practice of holiness, and conduct it to the posession of real, present, and everlasting felicity.

13. That repentance, regeneration, and holiness in heart and life, are absolutely necessary in order to prepare the soul for salvation and eternal glory. But that faith in Christ and that only, or the believing of the gospel, entitles poor sinful mortals to every part of happiness.

14. That the Holy Spirit, by the instrumentality of the word which exhibits the free salvation of Christ, works on the minds of sinners to bring them to God, and to the enjoyment of salvation by Jesus Christ : that the word accomplishes this blessed purpose wherever it takes place and is cordially received : and that pardon, righteousness, comfort, strength, and every other spiritual blessing are, in this way, communicated to man.

15. As God now treats with men on this new

foundation, both reason and scripture shew, that, though man is exposed to condemnation as a transgressor of the law, yet the condemnatory sentence is not executed upon any man, where the word is enjoyed, for breaking the law only, but for neglecting and rejecting the gospel and the salvation exhibited to us in it. In other words, men are now condemned and consigned finally to endless misery, because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved.

16. That God has chosen or appointed, from the beginning, that believers should be saved, and that unbelievers should be damned. Hence, in the New Testament, believers are called Elect; and unbelievers, Reprobate. These are not chosen because they are holy, but that they may be holy. The scripture does not say, that they are chosen *to* faith, but *through* sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. As God fore-knew all things, therefore this choice was made according to his foreknowledge: and, this is what I understand by the election of grace.

17. That true believers receive the Spirit by faith; by which they are regenerated or renewed; and hereby, not only are constituted the heirs of God; but, in a measure, made conformable to him in their minds; and so are from that time meet for glory. Yet they ought to grow in grace; and, by activity in all holiness, to be laying up treasure in heaven, where they shall, of free grace, be rewarded according to their works.

18. I believe, that the saints ought to be subject to civil magistrates, according to the constitution and laws by which they are governed in all civil matters; but in matters of religion, they are to pay regard to none but Christ.

19. That a gospel church is a community of

faithful persons, who are voluntarily united in christian love, to support their Redeemer's interest upon earth, and make it their great concern to proceed according to the best of their capacity, according to the rule of the New Testament, and those rules only : rejecting opinions and traditions of men, and hearkening diligently to the voice of their great Master who is in heaven.

20. That Jesus, our great Saviour and Master, has appointed two special ordinances, or positive institutions, to be observed in his church. These are Baptism and the Lord's-supper : the former to be performed only once ; but the latter, as often as can be made convenient : and both are to be continued in the church to the end of time.

21. That Baptism is designed to be a standing memorial and emblematical representation of the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and of our recovery from a death in sin to a spiritual and holy life by him ; and also to denote our surrendering of ourselves up intirely to his service. That the only scriptural way of administering this ordinance, is to immerse the person in water : and the only scriptural subjects are those that repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

22. That the Lord's-supper is a solemn eating of bread and drinking of wine together, as a memorial or emblematical representation of our blessed Saviour's sufferings for our sins, and the refreshment and spiritual nourishment that his sufferings administer to the souls of true believers: and that believers only are the scriptural subjects of it.

23. That there is a fixed time approaching, known only to God, when all the dead shall arise from their graves, and shall stand before

the Lord Jesus Christ, who is appointed of the Father to judge the world in righteousness; and will be seated on a glorious throne for that purpose. That this judgment, and the rewards or punishments consequent upon it, will be according to our works: that those who died in a state of sin and neglect of God, will be sent to everlasting punishment; but the righteous received to life eternal. That every man will be judged, and rewarded or punished according to the dispensation he has lived under, and that revelation of the will of God with which he has been favoured on earth. Those who have sinned without law must perish without law; those who have sinned in, or under the law, must be judged by the law; and all those who have had the use of the New Testament, will be judged according to the gospel. That the wicked, under every dispensation, will be punished in proportion to their wickedness; and the righteous rewarded according to their righteousness.

24. That when this awful and tremendous scene shall be closed, the two grand classes of mankind, the wicked and the righteous shall be sent to their own places, in which they shall eternally remain. The wicked must be everlastingly tormented with the devil and his angels, as they have in this world imitated them in sinning against the God of heaven and earth; and must for ever groan beneath the vengeance of that God against whom they have rebelled: while the righteous shall be eternally happy in the kingdom of their Father and Saviour. For they are then made kings and priests unto God, and shall reign with him for ever.

ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS.

Page 162.—A few particulars respecting the early history of the General Baptist church in Friar-Lane, Leicester, having been recently communicated, we insert them here, to preserve them from oblivion.

The origin of this society cannot be traced. The deed of conveyance of the premises, which were afterwards used as a meeting-house, is dated Aug. 8th. 1719. They were consigned, by Elias Wallin, to T. Davye, W. Arnold and S. Durance, in trust, for the congregation of Baptists at Leicester. An annuity of four pounds ten shillings, was, for a few years, imposed on them; but this was soon relinquished in favour of the pastor. Mr. T. Davye, who appears at this time to have been the pastor, was an attorney by profession: a man of considerable abilities and great piety. In 1719, he published a work intitled; “The Baptism of adult Believers only, asserted and vindicated; and that of Infants disproved.” This is a well written piece and discourses extensive reading.—Mr. Davye was succeeded in the pastoral office by Mr. W. Arnold; who was elder in 1750, when the number of members was twenty-four. After his decease Mr. J. Johnson laboured for them during a few years. Mr. S. Durance afterwards was the minister; but the cause declined under his care. After the death of Mr. Durance, Mr. Green, of Earlshilton, and several neighbouring ministers preached occasionally for this people. But their number diminished, and the cause was on the eve of dissolution, when a revival took place, as recorded in the work.

In the early part of the last century, several members of this society embracing calvinistic sentiments, left its communion, and laid the foundation of the particular baptist interest in Leicester. There was a kind of association maintained, for some time, by the General Baptist churches of Leicester, Earlshilton, Mountsorrel and Wimeswold, Smeeton and Knipton.

*Page 203. Note**—The amount of the money collected by the friends at Church-Lane towards building the meeting-house at Leicester, is highly incorrect. Mr. Deacon had paid a visit to Kent, &c; and as the building was not then begun, he was advised to place the proceeds of his journey in the public funds. This was done in the name of one of the deacons at Church-Lane; who, with a laudable concern for the security of the property, made an entry of the purchase in the Records of the

church, in such a style as led the author to conclude that the whole sum had been collected in London. The Leicester friends have kindly corrected the mistake: it seems that the contributions of the society in Church-Lane did not much exceed twenty pounds.

Page 352.—The term “*assistant minister*” is here improperly applied: as it appears that here was no other minister at Friar-Lane during any part of the time when Mr. Wood laboured for that society.

Page 366—The room at Duffield, which was first fitted up for preaching, was not *hired*; but gratuitously provided by Mr Taylor, that his neighbours might hear the gospel of salvation.

Page 409—We are sorry to learn that the design of building a meeting house at St. Ives was, owing to some unexpected difficulties, abandoned; and that the church continues to assemble in the old inconvenient place of worship. The confident language used in the sixth case of the Minutes for 1806, caused this misapprehension.

Page 418.—The meeting-house at Bourn was repaired in 1800, but not enlarged.



ERRATA.

- Page 138. line 6, for ‘*expressely*’ read ‘*expressly*.’
- — — — 14. for ‘*Boston*’ read ‘*Barton*.’
- — — — 29. add, “*H. Poole, of Fleet*.”
- — — — 156. — 28. for ‘*Sawley*’ read ‘*Smalley*.’
- — — — 173. Note *, line 6, for ‘*Ann Freeman*’ read ‘*Ann Trueman*.’
- — — — 176, line 18 for ‘*residence*’ read ‘*fellowship*.’
- — — — 240. — 31. for ‘*alteration*’ read ‘*altercation*.’
- — — — 368. — 2, for ‘1819,’ read ‘1817.’
- — — — 385. — 20, for ‘*W. Hollinrake*’ read ‘*H. Hollinrake*.’
- — — — 387. — 11. for ‘*gentlemen*’ read ‘*gentleman*.’
- — — — 401. — 11, for ‘*where*’ read ‘*were*’
- — — — 432, Note *, for ‘*p. 349*’ read ‘*p. 324*.’

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R. Butterfield	Joseph Jarrom	M. Beeston
Edward Bradley	C. Nicholls	Richard Bailey
Miss Bailey	W. Richards	W. Johnson
Robert Clarke	R. M. Waller	John North
Thomas Cox	Tilson Young	W Sleap
John Clare		John Slee
		Thomas Wesley

MISCELLANEOUS.

W. Bigwood	Samuel Lawrance, <i>Epworth</i>
Mr. Dore, <i>Isle of Wight</i>	G. Purcell, <i>Wrotham</i> , 4 copies
J. Featherstone, <i>Queenborough</i>	W. Richards, <i>Lynn Regis</i>
Mr. Henham, <i>Smarden</i>	Rev. John Stulterd, <i>Colne</i>
Isaac James, <i>Bristol</i>	Francis Tutty, <i>East-Halton</i>
Fl. J., <i>Kingsford, Chartham, Kent</i>	T. Wornall, <i>Bristol</i>
Sampson Kingsford, <i>Canterbury</i>	Smith Watson, <i>Butterwick</i>
Mrs. Lankford, <i>Fordingbridge</i>	P. Wornall, <i>Basingstoke</i>

N.B. The Author is sensible that the above List is very imperfect; owing to the want of information or the mislaying of letters. If any names are omitted through his carelessness, he assures his friends that it was done unintentionally, and sincerely begs their pardon.

